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## **THE AWAKENING OF ITALY**



THE AWAKENING  
OF ITALY,  
THE FASCISTA REGENERATION

BY  
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# THE AWAKENING OF ITALY THE FASCISTA REGENERATION

## CHAPTER I

### ITALY BEFORE THE WAR

THE significance of recent political developments in Italy and the sudden and successful revolution whereby the Fascisti came into power cannot be adequately appreciated if we consider Fascismo as an isolated phenomenon. It must be studied as a feature, albeit a most important one, in the general picture of Italian political and economic history since the outbreak of the World War. Its beginnings indeed must be sought in certain events and tendencies preceding the war.

Before the war Italian political parties were, with one exception, reduced to small coteries of particular interests concentrating round certain prominent politicians. The one exception was the Socialist party, which had come into the forefront of political life towards the end of the nineteenth century, and professed to represent the great mass of the working classes. The conditions of the latter were then not satisfactory, and their discontent was a valuable asset for the new party. But the true cause of the unsatisfactory state of the workers was the general poverty of the country, from which all classes suffered, and the remedy should have been sought in the elevation of the economic and social conditions of the people as a whole rather than in the policy of class hatred and sordid materialism which

the Socialists advocated to the detriment of all forms of national idealism and of the sense of duty.

Giovanni Giolitti, who for many years had been the leading figure of Italian political life, never faced the great national problems, but was content to juggle with parties and situations in order to avoid straight issues. He professed democratic sentiments, but did not really sympathize with any political tendency, and was ready to favour any party, provided that by so doing he could carry on a little longer. To the Socialists he conceded many favours, without believing in their tenets, and during the epidemic of strikes which raged in 1904-1908—at one moment there were no less than eight hundred such movements at once—he allowed the strikers a free hand in the hope that they would end by getting tired of striking ; in return they gave him a certain measure of support, but the Government, by thus submitting to blackmail, had to buy back, by yet further concessions, the right to maintain a semblance of authority. The real political and economic questions he never seriously tackled. During the general strike of 1904, in which for the first time the railwaymen took part, the public reacted, and sticks were raised by private citizens against the revolutionaries ; " those sticks," as the *Corriere della Sera* wrote, " were destined to make a wonderful career."

Against the absolutely anti-national attitude of the Socialists there was for many years no reaction. The Socialist party grew in strength and organization, while the non-Socialists were divided into numerous groups who did not feel strongly on any question and could offer nothing likely to arouse general enthusiasm. The machinery of government moved slowly and not too smoothly, and it was difficult for any class of persons to obtain satisfaction even for legitimate demands unless they agitated and disturbed the public peace. Consequently it was the most turbulent who got what they wanted, to the detriment of the nation as a whole. Patriotic feeling had not penetrated deeply into the national conscience, and every one tended to regard what was done in Italy as less good than what was

done abroad. The Government and the administration were constantly abused for their shortcomings, real or imaginary. No one, save a few far-sighted thinkers, believed that the country would ever have to defend itself against a foreign enemy, as no one believed in war. Pacifism was not a logically thought-out theory, but a state of mind produced by scepticism. Italy had had, it is true, a war with Abyssinia which had ended disastrously, but the public regarded it as a distant event, and few realized the harm done to the prestige of the nation by the peace concluded before the defeat had been retrieved. Fortunately there was a very fine tradition in the Army, which was able to survive the contemptuous neglect with which it was regarded by a large part of the public.

Public attention was so monopolized by internal and economic problems that international questions were but little studied. Few people travelled abroad, and the great currents of foreign policy were hardly understood. There were, however, two international questions which aroused real interest among the Italian people. One was that of Franco-Italian relations, and the other was Irredentism. While all Italians recognized that they owed a debt of gratitude to France for the help afforded by her to Italy in the wars of the Risorgimento, they felt that that debt had to some extent been repaid by the cession of Savoy and Nice, and the subsequent attitude of France towards Italy was not calculated to improve relations between the two countries. It was this attitude which drove Italy into the Triple Alliance, a combination for which the people as a whole never felt any genuine sympathy. Irredentism was in one sense a survival of the wars of independence, and it was kept alive by the fact that at the end of those wars, in 1866, the Italian districts of the Trentino, Trieste, Istria, Gorizia, etc., were still held by Austria ; above all, the frontier was so delimited that a wedge of Austrian territory penetrated into Italy, ever threatening her security. In later years the unfriendly attitude of France obliged Italy, as we have seen, to seek an alliance with Germany, and that involved one with Austria as well,

## THE AWAKENING OF ITALY

which was acquiesced in as a necessity but was never popular. In time, public opinion might have reconciled itself to this arrangement, had it not been for the constant and uncompromising hostility of Austria. Whenever the statesmen of the two countries seemed about to succeed by laborious effort in establishing an *entente*, the Imperial and Royal Government or some of its organs or officials—an exuberant general, an indiscreet archduke, or a fanatical prelate—would commit some *gaffe* which nullified the work of the politicians. At the same time the unceasing persecution of the Italian subjects of the Monarchy kept the flame of Irredentism ceaselessly burning among large masses of people who would have been unaffected by the most painstaking propaganda. Austria-Hungary was ever increasing her armaments and strengthening her fortifications on the Italian frontier, with no attempt to disguise the objects of these measures.

If Austria was arming, so were France, Germany, and Russia, while Britain strengthened her navy. Italy alone neglected her defences, both for reasons of economy and because the bulk of the nation disbelieved in the possibility of war, while the Socialists, Republicans and many Democrats conducted a tireless campaign against what they described as "unproductive expenditure," preferring that the money of the taxpayers should be squandered in fantastic social legislation and an ever-increasing and not too efficient bureaucracy.

It was as a reaction against this unreasoning pacifism of the masses and the truculence of the Socialists that the Nationalist movement arose. Constituted at the Florence Congress of 1910, under the leadership of Enrico Corradini, who had founded *Il Regno* a few years before, a short-lived literary and political weekly, hostile to the demagogic policy of successive Governments and to Socialism, and Luigi Federzoni, an able Bolognese journalist, the programme of the new group, which became a party some months later, was the rehabilitation of the national patriotic idea, the development of the civic spirit and of the sense of duty towards the community, the realization of the

necessity for adequate measures of national defence, and uncompromising opposition to all disintegrating and internationalist tendencies. At first the Nationalists were a small coterie of intellectuals, mostly young men of the middle classes, whose strength lay in their almost religious devotion to the patriotic idea and in the fact that they were all high-minded men of sterling honesty. Corradini is indeed a veritable apostle, who has devoted his whole life and career to, and whose every act and every thought was inspired by, the national ideal.

It was largely due to the Nationalists that, when the international situation in 1911 made war with Turkey over the Libyan question inevitable, the country rose to the occasion and supported Giolitti's policy. Unfortunately the war was not well conducted, especially on the political side, the Premier regarding it merely as a move in the party game to be manœuvred and exploited as though it were a parliamentary crisis or an agrarian strike in the Po Valley. But the war did serve to show that the military spirit of the country was not dead, and that when properly led the Italian peasant or workman could develop into an excellent soldier. It also produced another result. The Socialists had of course opposed the war and tried to make out that it was a nefarious game engineered by the capitalists for their own interests, because they feared that any development of patriotic feeling among the masses might divert the attention of the latter from class war. But some of the leaders of the Socialist party had begun to feel repugnance for the purely materialistic tendency which it was following and for its rabidly anti-patriotic attitude ; on the outbreak of the war they openly supported the Government. At the Socialist Congress of Reggio Emilia in June, 1912, they were solemnly "excommunicated" by the majority of the party, and Socialism split up into two groups—the Reformist Socialists, who were ready to collaborate with the Constitutional parties and comprised men such as Ivanoe Bonomi, Leonida Bissolati and Orazio Raimondo, and the "Official" Socialists, who constituted the majority and remained uncompromisingly revolutionary

and anti-national. The former group ended by being absorbed by the Liberals, and was finally dissolved in November, 1922, while the latter attracted to itself all the more turbulent sections of the working classes and not a few criminal elements, but it lost most of its intellectual adherents, although the leadership continued to remain in the hands of men belonging to the middle classes. A new type of Socialist, however, now came more and more into prominence and acquired ever-increasing influence over the policy of the party, viz. the paid secretaries of the labour unions and the *Camere del Lavoro*<sup>1</sup> and the professional organizers, whose chief function was to promote strikes and labour agitations and riots.

Giolitti, in order to gain the support of the masses, introduced a measure providing for a wide extension of the franchise, which was first applied at the elections of October, 1913, and resulted in an increase of the Socialist vote, fifty-three Official Socialists and twenty-six Reformists being returned. At the same elections, the Pope having withdrawn the *non expedit*, thirty-three Catholic deputies were elected, and Giolitti at once tried to exploit this first appearance of a Catholic party. But the elections had shaken his position, and as there were several awkward problems to be faced—the need for fresh taxation, the Albanian tangle, the threat of a railway strike, and the division among his own followers over the question of relations with the Catholics—he resigned on March 10, 1914, with the avowed intention of returning to power as soon as his successor had cleared up the mess.

Antonio Salandra, the leader of the Right, and one of the ablest and most honest statesmen in Italy, formed the new Cabinet, with the Marquis di San Giuliano as Minister of Foreign Affairs. But not all his other colleagues were up to his standard, and the new Government did not enjoy a very wide measure of support in the Chamber, where the majority was still Giolittian. In June riots of an unmistakably revolutionary character broke out at Ancona, and

<sup>1</sup> Nominally labour exchanges, but in reality institutions for organizing and promoting revolutionary agitation.

extended to the rest of the Marche, Romagna and Umbria, and most of the larger cities, including Rome and Milan. There were no particular economic grievances involved, but the railwaymen also took part in the movement; in several places ridiculous mock "republics" were set up, which attempted to reduce the price of foodstuffs to impossibly low figures, whence they became known as the "republics of fowls at fifty centesimi." The civil authorities proved unequal to the situation, and in many places were reduced to impotence; but a popular reaction soon set in, under the leadership of the Nationalists, and rapidly cleared the streets of the revolutionary elements in the large cities, while the advent of bodies of troops restored order in the other disaffected districts. Altogether few lives were lost, a certain amount of material damage was done and many of the rioters were arrested, although only a small number received heavy sentences, and the anarchist Enrico Malatesta, the chief organizer of the movement, escaped.

The events of the "Red Week" were made party capital of not only by the Socialist deputies, but also by some of the Giolittian opponents of the Cabinet, but they failed to bring about its fall. The railwaymen threatened to strike again if their companions implicated in the recent riots were punished, but this time the Government acted with energy, and punishment was inflicted on the guilty. The class of 1891<sup>1</sup> was called back to the colours.

On the outbreak of the World War we had in Italy the following situation. The Government, led by a capable and honest man, was unable to count on a stable majority, as most of the deputies were bound by party or personal ties to Giolitti; it was opposed by a small but turbulent and noisy Socialist minority, supported to some extent by an uncertain number of deputies of other parties, while the Catholic group was of doubtful tendencies. There was a flourishing industrial movement in the north, which was slowly extending southward; agriculture was prosperous in northern and central Italy, but more backward in the

<sup>1</sup> I.e. the men born in 1891 who had already served their time in the Army and had been demobilized.

south and the islands. The working classes, especially in the industrial districts, were largely under the influence of the Socialists, and generally discontented with their lot, partly for good reasons and partly on account of the Socialist propaganda, which, conducted by second-rate men, seldom sincere or strictly honest, was not merely economic but also political, revolutionary and anti-patriotic. A considerable number of workers, mostly of the peasant class, emigrated abroad every year, most of whom returned to Italy sooner or later. The large middle class, monopolizing the bureaucracy and the professions, was honest in the main, hard-working, and steady, but inspired by essentially *petit bourgeois* ideals and not interested in the problems of foreign policy. The aristocracy and the upper middle class were beginning to grow up to a higher level of political and economic thought, but only beginning. We also find a general increase of prosperity and intellectual activity among all classes, but a general lack of confidence in the government (not in the particular government of the day, but in government in the abstract), and in the bureaucracy, in part justified by the shortcomings of the various organs of the State, but in part exaggerated.

In a social and political *milieu* such as I have described, the terrible world crisis leading to the war appeared to the mass of Italian public opinion even more astounding and incredible than was the case in the other great countries of Europe.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PERIOD OF NEUTRALITY

WE have seen what was the situation of Italy on the outbreak of the war. When the danger of a world conflict appeared imminent Italy loyally co-operated with Britain in the attempt to avert the catastrophe ; but once all hope of a peaceful settlement had vanished, the terrible question presented itself to the mind of every Italian as to what part Italy should play in the struggle. Italy was a member of the Triple Alliance, and had in fact renewed that agreement on December 7, 1912, before it had lapsed. Its terms had been kept secret, but while the more thinking part of the public realized that if the conflict were to cause a *casus faederis* to arise, Italy would be in honour bound to stand by her Allies, the idea of siding with Austria-Hungary was repugnant to the immense majority of the nation. Not only did Austria's conduct in the conflict appear unjustifiable and inspired exclusively by her selfish anxiety to re-establish her much-shaken prestige in the Balkans at no matter what cost, but her policy had been so persistently anti-Italian and so uncompromisingly hostile to her Italian-speaking subjects that it seemed inconceivable that Italian blood should be shed to support her Imperialist ambitions. On the other hand, in spite of France's frequent unfriendly acts, there was in Italy still a great deal of friendly sentiment towards her, and whatever secrets diplomacy might guard concerning the policy of the various Powers, her obvious position was that of a victim of an unprovoked and brutal aggression. The invasion of Belgium also did much to arouse the sympathies of the Italian people in favour of the Entente. Finally, the attitude of England caused much hesitation. Public feeling was on the whole pro-British ; further, if

Italy took sides against Britain, her strategic position, with her long sea coast exposed to attacks and her dependence on foreign imports for coal and part of her foodstuffs, would have been extremely critical.

Fortunately, under the terms of the Alliance the *casus fœderis* did not arise, as Germany and Austria had undertaken a war of aggression, and also had failed to consult Italy before taking action, and to the general relief the Government issued its declaration of neutrality on August 2nd. This relief was further enhanced when Britain entered the lists against Germany.<sup>1</sup> But from this moment public opinion was torn by another conflict of tendencies, not less agonizing than the former one, although the decision was less urgent. It having been admitted that Italy was not bound to go to war on behalf of the Central Empires, was she to remain neutral to the end of the conflict?—and, if so, what would her international position be?—or would she too be drawn into the vortex? In the latter contingency it seemed fairly certain that Italy would only intervene on the side of Entente, for every day that passed and every new action of the Central Empires made the possibility that Italy might side with them appear more remote. But it was at first very doubtful whether Italy would ever go to war at all. Never was a great people faced with such an awful dilemma. What was certain was that Italy could not go to war at once. There were, it is true, large numbers of troops under arms; besides the two regular classes of 1892 and 1893, that of 1891 had been recently recalled on account of the threatened railway strike, and those of 1889 and 1890 were now recalled on the outbreak of war, so that there were from 400,000 to 500,000 men available, to which the recruits of 1894 would be added in the autumn. But the stores had to be replenished, immense quantities of arms and ammunition manufactured, the whole of the field artillery to be renewed and the heavy artillery to be practically created, and, in fact, everything to be reorganized.

<sup>1</sup> The existence of a clause in the Triple Alliance Treaty whereby Italy was not bound to intervene on the side of her allies if they were involved in a conflict against Britain was then unknown.

To mention but a few details, there were only 750,000 rifles of the 1891 model in the depots, 350,000 uniforms were lacking, and only forty motor lorries were available. The Army had been left in a deplorable state after the Libyan war ; the Giolitti Government, which might then have obtained all the necessary credits from Parliament without difficulty, had not wished to risk its popularity by asking for them. It had even supplied inaccurate returns in answer to questions put to it in the Chamber. The many years of demagogic rule had resulted in a general neglect of national defence, which even the Libyan war had failed to remedy. Apart from the deficient equipment, the officers' corps was woefully inadequate ; in July, 1914, there were but 26,000 officers. Apart from the small number of regular officers, some excellent and some less good, there were the *ufficiali di complemento*, i.e. young men who had done their ordinary military service and then passed examinations as reserve officers before returning to civil life, and the reserve officers proper (ex-regulars who had left the service). The *ufficiali di complemento* were on the whole very good, but comparatively few in numbers, as for the last ten years, no one having believed in war, exemptions from military service were easily granted and the one-year volunteers were not encouraged to follow the officers' training course. The mass of the people had never been made to realize the necessity for armed defence, so that the military spirit in a general way was not developed among the working classes, nor even in a large part of the aristocracy and middle classes. Indeed, the former could be made into good soldiers more rapidly than could the latter into good officers. The last wars fought by Italy had supplied but few lessons, as they merely involved armies of a few score thousands, whereas in the coming conflict millions of men would have to be recruited, and the whole of the rest of the nation mobilized to feed, clothe, and arm them.

It was therefore necessary to create the Army practically out of nothing, except the good regimental traditions of the regular officers, the patriotic spirit of the *ufficiali di complemento*, and the hardiness, sobriety, and amenableness

to discipline of the average workman and peasant. Whatever criticisms may be made of General Cadorna, the Chief of the General Staff, as a strategist, there is no doubt that his achievement in building up the Army out of such inadequate material in ten months was a magnificent one. The country owes him a deep debt of gratitude for this if for nothing else, for hardly another man could have done better or even as well.

Another great handicap, which, however, also helped eventually to induce Italy to go to war, was the frontier. In 1866 the Austro-Italian frontier had been drawn up in such a way as to give Austria all the advantages, especially on the side of the Trentino, which formed a wedge, bristling with fortifications, driven into the very heart of Italy, with a dozen roads branching out into the Venetian plain.

The attitude of the various parties and sections of the public and the deep divisions of opinion in the country constituted a serious obstacle to the policy of the Government. The latter had at first no very definite tendency, but it proceeded with laudable energy to carry the necessary military preparations. Signor Salandra was probably pro-Entente in his sympathies, but at first he hesitated at the idea of intervention. The Minister of War, General Grandi, resigned on October 8th on account of a disagreement with the Treasury Minister, Rubini, over military expenditure, and was replaced by General Zupelli, a native of Istria, in itself a significant fact. The Marquis di San Giuliano, Minister for Foreign Affairs, had been so bound up with the Triple Alliance throughout his career that he found it difficult to conceive a foreign policy for his country opposed to it; but he too worked hard to strengthen Italy's diplomatic position, and, on October 16th, died in harness, working at his desk almost to the last, in spite of constant pain. The Prime Minister took over the Foreign Office for a few weeks, and on October 18th pronounced the celebrated phrase about "sacred egoism for Italy." On November 2nd he handed the department over to Baron Sidney Sonnino. Sonnino was undoubtedly one of the ablest men in Italy, deeply patriotic, of the most sterling

rectitude, highly cultivated and endowed with a keen insight into men and events, combined with a sound culture. As a parliamentarian he had not been a success, owing to his lack of eloquence, his uncompromising, almost Puritanical, rigidity, and a certain ostentation of irony which many took for cynicism ; he had been Minister several times and had a thorough knowledge of financial and economic problems, and twice Prime Minister, but only remained in office for a hundred days each time. His appointment to the Foreign Office came as a surprise to many, but he soon showed that he possessed a real grasp of international problems, and his weakness as a speaker was in this field no drawback ; no one of his predecessors had indeed shown such absolute reticence in dealing with foreign diplomats as did Sonnino all through the complicated and delicate negotiations preceding Italy's intervention. At the Peace Conference, where *doigté* and a conciliatory spirit were the chief requisites, his really great qualties did not appear to the best advantage.

With the appointment of Sonnino as Minister for Foreign Affairs the tendency of the Government began gradually to be orientated in the direction of intervention, but Sonnino himself left no stone unturned to find a way whereby the vital interests of Italy might be secured without the necessity of a recourse to arms. Of the other Ministers, Signor Orlando, the Minister of Justice, was a decided interventionist, while the rest still remained uncertain. In Parliament and the country generally the situation was as follows. A small group belonging to the Right, comprising a certain part of the aristocracy and persons having business or family interests in Germany, was frankly pro-German ; so were all the snobs, as Germany and Austria were regarded as more aristocratic countries than Britain or France ; and also those who looked upon Germany as the bulwark of order and authority. No one, however, confessed to pro-Austrian sentiments, and very few felt them. The majority of the deputies and senators were Giolittians, and awaited the word of the Master before pronouncing themselves, but on the whole were neutralists, as they were afraid of

the consequences of war and were unaccustomed to heroic decisions. Another group of Conservatives and the Nationalists were definitely interventionists, and of course pro-Entente ; their view was that their country's interests demanded the defeat of the German attempt at world hegemony, the completion of Italian unity by the annexation of the unredeemed territories, the securing of a defensible position, and the establishment of Italy's position as a great Power by taking part in the world struggle for the final settlement of Europe. This view was more general outside Parliament and official circles than within. The Radicals, Reformist Socialists, most of the Republicans, and the Democrats in general were also pro-Entente, but for sentimental reasons and political affinities, because they regarded Britain and France as democratic Powers fighting against Austro-German military Imperialism. The fact that Russia, whom they regarded as on a par with Germany as a reactionary Power, was in the Entente caused them some doubts, but they believed that the Entente as a whole was prevalently Liberal.

The Catholics, or rather Clericals, waited on the Vatican, and the Vatican attempted to maintain an attitude of impartial detachment, in spite of the German outrages against the Catholic churches and clergy in France and Belgium, but its tendency was, on the whole, more favourable to the Central Empires. Austria was the only truly Catholic great Power left on whom the Church could rely. France was regarded as atheistic, in spite of the trend towards a Catholic revival which the war had provoked. Germany too had suggested that if she were victorious a settlement of the Roman question might be arrived at in conformity with the wishes of the Holy See. Finally, certain Clericals, including some influential cardinals, were afraid of a Russian victory on account of Russia's attitude towards the Catholic Church in Galicia, where her chief anxiety seemed to be to rope the Ruthenian Catholics into the fold of the Orthodox Church.

The civil services as a whole were neutralist, but most of the officials sympathized with the Entente, except perhaps

at the Foreign Office, where the Triple Alliance tradition was still strong. The Army was interventionist, but a certain number of officers, especially those on the staff, who had studied in Germany or according to German methods, had German sympathies and were convinced that the Central Empires would win. But they were always ready to obey their country's call without question on whichever side intervention was ultimately decided upon. The Navy was somewhat more pro-Entente, and particularly pro-British, on account of its admiration for the British naval tradition. In the intellectual world a certain number of professors and scholars, who had been brought up on German studies, were pro-German and therefore neutralist ; but others, undoubtedly the majority, were pro-Entente from a sense of the essential justice of the Entente cause and its conformity with the higher interests of Italy.

Among the Socialists, those who belonged to the "Official" Socialist party were neutralists to a man, not because they believed that neutrality was beneficial to Italian interests, but because of their profession of pacifism and because they were afraid that Italian intervention in the war would strengthen patriotic feeling among the masses and distract them from what they regarded as the only legitimate field for their activity, i.e. class warfare and the struggle for economic and material advantages. They professed to regard all military expenditure as beneficial only to the capitalists, whom they represented as blood-suckers anxious to drive the proletariat to massacre while they got rich on army contracts. Austro-German secret service funds were also largely distributed among the more rabidly anti-patriotic members of the party, but it is difficult to say what influence they actually exercised.

The working classes as a whole did not accept without question the view of those who professed to represent them ; but as a rule they were neutralist, except in the provinces bordering on Austria, where the anti-Austrian tradition had survived from Risorgimento days, in certain large towns and in parts of the south, because they had not been taught to realize Italy's position as a world Power and merely considered

the possibility of war from the point of view of their own immediate interests and convenience. There was also a general belief, shared by all classes and even by the Government, which the facts were to disprove, that intervention would produce immediate unemployment, a reduction of wages, and a rapid increase of prices, and this of course strengthened neutralist tendencies. But among the working classes there was practically no pro-German feeling ; German and Austrian atrocities in France, Belgium, and Serbia tended to arouse pro-Entente sentiments even among those who were not yet converted to the idea of intervention.

By a large part of the population, even in pro-Entente circles, the Central Empires were regarded as the stronger group. The fact that they had overrun Belgium, part of Northern France, Poland, Serbia, etc., and that the Allied Armies were only just able to hold their own, could not fail to affect political opinion. German propaganda was much more active than the French, while that of Britain simply did not exist, and it constantly dwelt on the "war map" and the immense power of the Central Empires. But it frequently overreached itself, especially when it tried to terrify the Italian people by threats of frightfulness in case Italy should dare to side with the Entente. On the other hand, Irredentism, which for many decades had been regarded by the mass of the people, and even by the educated public, with indifference—almost as a survival of a past age—now assumed a reality and popularity such as it had never had before. The many Austrian Italians who, risking their lives and property, escaped into Italy in order to avoid serving under the hated *Schwarzgelb*, were among the most active and successful pro-Entente propagandists ; they carried all the more weight inasmuch as many of them had suffered real persecution at the hands of the Imperial and Royal Government. It should be added that when the general mobilization was ordered in Italy they were among the first to join the colours as volunteers, although they well knew that if captured they would be hanged as traitors —a fate which actually befell Cesare Battisti and others. Not a few, who had already served in the Austrian Army

as officers and were entitled to similar rank in the Italian Army, refused to avail themselves of that privilege, and preferred to serve as privates until they obtained promotion in the ordinary course or for meritorious services.

Until the early spring of 1915 it may be said that the majority of public opinion was pro-Entente in sentiment, but favoured neutrality. The small band of Nationalists, intellectuals, Irredenti, and Democrats of various shades slowly but ceaselessly worked in favour of intervention, in spite of the apparently irresistible obstacles offered by selfishness, private interest, want of character, and unreasoning party feeling, and gradually made an increasing number of converts. The Press on the whole was pro-Entente, except for the Socialist *Avanti* and a few mushroom rags which had sprung up during the period of neutrality and were obviously financed by Germany.

It was on December 2, 1914, that the Government first hinted at a policy of intervention, when the Prime Minister alluded to "the vital interests to be safeguarded and the just aspirations to be affirmed and supported."<sup>1</sup> These words were received with great applause, and the Sicilian Socialist deputy De Felice immediately shouted, "Viva Trieste italiana!" Public opinion began to see ever more clearly that if Italy's national aspirations were not realized now they never would be at all; and while the ranks of the interventionists increased they received support from the most unexpected quarters. When the war broke out Benito Mussolini, who is to-day Prime Minister of Italy, was an active revolutionist and editor of the *Avanti* the official organ of the Socialist party. A few words on the early career of this remarkable man are necessary.

<sup>1</sup> Born in the commune of Predappio in the province of Forli on July 29, 1883, he was the son of a blacksmith, but was descended from a family of small, independent peasants. He received a better education than most of his class, and eventually became an elementary school teacher. He stood as a candidate for a municipal election, and owing

<sup>1</sup> Giuseppe Brucoleri: "Dal conflitto europeo alla Guerra nostra," Rome, 1915, p. 66.

to a row over the voting he was fined, imprisoned, and afterwards took refuge in Switzerland. At Lausanne he worked as a navvy, but followed the courses at the university and obtained a diploma as teacher of French. Subsequently he returned to Italy, where he earned a precarious existence as a free-lance journalist and joined the Socialist party. In 1908 we find him editor of the *Avvenire* of Trento and contributor to Cesare Battisti's paper *Il Popolo*, until he was expelled from Austria as a dangerous revolutionist. After the Socialist Congress of Reggio Emilia in 1912, he was appointed editor of the *Avanti*, which includes in its list of editors both the late Leonida Bissolati and the future Premier Bonomi. As a writer he was distinguished by the vigour and violence of his views, but he always retained a certain distinction of style, and as a speaker he was remarkable for his burning eloquence. In the troubles of the Romagna in June, 1914, which had been organized by the Socialist party, but with a Republican tendency, long a Romagnol tradition, Mussolini was one of the most active leaders. But the party threw up the sponge as soon as it realized that the movement was a failure, and Mussolini, who was already disgusted with the narrow opportunism of the General Confederation of Labour, which was allied with the Socialists, delivered some very stinging criticisms on the party directorate. His views were gradually shaping themselves in a direction different to that of the party on many points. The French Socialist writer, Georges Sorel, said of him in January, 1912, "Our Mussolini is not an ordinary Socialist. Believe me, you may one day perhaps see him at the head of a sacred battalion, saluting with drawn sword the Italian flag. He is an Italian of the fifteenth century, a *condottiero*. It is not yet known, but he is the only energetic man capable of repairing the weakness of the Government." He was certainly destined to prove a very extraordinary Socialist indeed! He felt the Irredentist movement, like his former editor, Cesare Battisti, who although a Socialist was to die a martyr's death for the Italian cause. Italy, Mussolini had once said, can never become Socialist if she is not

first completely Italian. He grasped the practical and moral necessity of his fatherland in the competition of European interests. Further, he refused to obey the orders of his party blindly and without discussion, a rare thing among Socialists, who have always inculcated unquestioning and unreasoning discipline as an absolute dogma of the faith.

From the moment war broke out he instinctively understood the necessity for Italian intervention, and never wavered in his conviction, which he made no effort to hide, and tried to draw his comrades after him in that policy. The bulk of the party was, however, too clearly bound up with pusillanimous pacifism to see the true bearing of political events in Europe, and refused to listen to him. He resigned his editorship of the *Avanti*, and on November 15, 1914, commenced the publication of his own *Popolo d'Italia*, a daily paper which began by describing itself as a Socialist organ, but from its first number adopted a policy strongly in favour of Italian intervention. At the meeting of the Milan section of the Socialist party on November 25th, Mussolini was definitely expelled from it. His speech on that occasion, advocating intervention in the most eloquent and stirring language, ended with the following pronouncement :

" I tell you from this moment that I shall have no compunction, no pity for all those who in this tragic hour will not speak out frankly for fear of hisses or cries of *Abbasso!* I shall have no compunction, no pity for all those who are reticent, for all those who are cowards. And you will still see me by your side. You must not believe that the bourgeoisie is enthusiastic over our interventionism. It growls, it accuses us of temerity, and fears that the proletariat armed with bayonets may use them for its own purposes."<sup>1</sup>

From that moment Mussolini and his paper conducted a vigorous and unremitting campaign in favour of intervention—a campaign appealing not to the middle classes, but to the masses. In a speech delivered at Parma in December following, after stating that bourgeois pacifism was not worth considering, he pointed out how the war

<sup>1</sup> Benito Mussolini : " Discorsi politici," Milan, 1921, p. 17.

had killed the old working class "International," because the German Socialists, who were its chief buttress, fell into the ranks behind the Kaiser's banner to a man, thus obliging the Socialists of other countries to return to the bosom of the nation and to the necessity for national defence. "German national unanimity has automatically determined the unanimity of other countries."<sup>1</sup> No influence contributed more to convince at least a part of the working classes of the necessity of intervention than that of Mussolini and his paper, but of course from that moment he became an object of the most vindictive and savage hatred on the part of the Socialists.

On the other hand, Giliotti now began to take up a definite position in favour of neutrality, and Giliotti's attitude was faithfully reflected by the Giolittian majority in the Chamber and by his many adherents in the country. But his policy was more inspired by hostility towards the Salandra Cabinet than by any definite convictions of his own—it was doubtful whether he ever had any on this question—and he lay in wait for it to give evidence of a tendency in one or other direction in order to adopt the opposite thesis. As in January the Government seemed to be inclining towards intervention, Giolitti prepared for an anti-intervention campaign. At this time Prince von Bülow, the ex-German Chancellor, was in Rome, where he had been sent on a special mission to secure if possible the absolute neutrality of Italy to the end of the war by bringing about an understanding between her and Austria. A large part of his diplomatic activity consisted in a vigorous propaganda among his aristocratic friends and connexions (his wife was an Italian, a sister of Senator Prince Camporeale and a daughter of Donna Laura Minghetti, widow of the statesman), and by means of certain shady journalists and newspapers. Above all he kept in close touch with Giolitti and the Giolittians, whom he regarded as the most influential supporters of his policy, as he believed Giolitti to be the arbiter of Parliament. Prince von Bülow's flattery was not without effect, and Giolitti, in a public letter addressed to

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 24.

his devoted henchman, the deputy Camillo Peano, one of the many second-rate men who had risen into prominence simply through friendship with him, declared his belief that Italy might obtain "a great deal" (the famous *parecchio*) without going to war. All honest public opinion violently apostrophized the *parecchio* letter, which appeared singularly inopportune at a moment when, as Giolitti well knew, very delicate negotiations were being conducted by Baron Sonnino with the object of inducing Austria to give Italy at least a part of the unredeemed lands and an adequate frontier without the necessity for going to war, to which he wished to have recourse only as a last resort if all else failed. Although he had probably made up his mind by this time that war was inevitable, he determined to neglect no measure which might render it unnecessary. The *parecchio* letter, coming from so authoritative a source, could not fail to discount Italy's foreign policy, while also producing an impression on the more unthinking part of the people, and engender yet further delusions. The German and Austrian Press interpreted the letter in its own way—in the sense that by remaining neutral Italy might obtain not Trieste and Trento, but Nice, Savoy, Corsica, Malta, and Tunis. Offers in that sense were at one time made to Italy by the Central Powers. All this served to perplex and divide public opinion still further.

When Baron Sonnino was definitely convinced that further negotiations with Austria were fruitless—Austria's final offer went no further than a part of the Trentino and the territory west of the Isonzo, to be ceded to Italy after the war, with local autonomy for Trieste—he opened negotiations with the Entente Powers, which resulted in the now famous Pact of London, signed on April 26, 1915. When the failure of the negotiations with Austria became known, the Giolittians spread about the report that Austria and not Italy would declare war, and that this fact would deprive Italian action of any character of hostility towards Germany or of solidarity with the Entente (it must always be borne in mind that although there were pro-German and anti-Entente sentiments in Italy, no pro-Austrians existed

except in extreme Vatican circles). This suggestion was made in an interview accorded by a Giolittian ex-Minister to a reporter of the *Avanti*, said to have been the late Signor Bertolini.<sup>1</sup> Although Prince von Bülow had declared that if Italy went to war with Austria, Germany would do her duty as an ally and support the latter against Italian aggression, there was a fairly widespread belief that Italy might find herself at war with Austria but at peace with Germany, and this reconciled a good many pro-Germans to the idea of Italian intervention. In fact, when Italy did go to war it was at first against Austria alone, which tended to place her in a false position towards her allies.

On May 3rd Italy declared that her alliance with the Dual Monarchy was at an end, and von Bülow, realizing that this meant war, made a last desperate attempt to save the situation. In his effort he found willing support in Giolitti. The ex-Premier had returned to Rome on the 9th, and at once began an active intrigue to prevent Italian intervention at the very last moment. Although he had been informed by Salandra of the engagements entered into by the Government with the Entente, he summoned all his followers to provoke a Cabinet crisis in order to return to power himself, and three hundred deputies left cards at his house as a sign of their unswerving fealty. It is said that his intention was, when once he was again at the head of the Government, to find the first pretext for going to war, either against the Central Empires or the Entente, and that the sole object of his manœuvre was to get into office once more. Perhaps this supposition is gratuitous, as, whatever his own intentions may have been, the general tendency of the mass of his supporters was decidedly neutralist. The Prime Minister realized that if the Giolittian deputies turned against him he would be in a minority; on the 13th the Cabinet resigned. But this resignation, brought about by the attempt of Giolitti, aroused a widespread national reaction. All the best elements in the country felt that now that Italy had contracted definite engagements with the Entente she was bound to carry them out, and that at

<sup>1</sup> Brucolieri, op. cit., p. 210.

all costs Giolitti and his followers must be prevented from dishonouring the nation. We must not forget the part played by D'Annunzio in these events. From the moment the war broke out he became deeply impressed with the necessity for Italy's intervention, and his addresses to the Italian people, full of eloquent and inspiring patriotism, did much to arouse public opinion. In the spring of 1915 he returned to Italy from France, and his speeches at Quarto for the celebration of Garibaldi's Sicilian expedition, and in Rome, struck a new note in the field of political literature. His words undoubtedly contributed very considerably to convert the Italians. What Mussolini had done for the masses and the politically minded, D'Annunzio did for the intellectual and literary classes.

Monster demonstrations were now held in Rome and other cities against Giolitti's policy, and the King, who at all the most critical moments of Italian history always realized the true feelings of the nation, in spite of the snarlings of second-rate politicians, and the shouts of the unthinking, supported Salandra. Giolitti did not dare to assume office himself—the game would have been too barefaced and dangerous—but tried to foist one or other of his lieutenants or some ingenuous or too-ambitious rival into the presidential chair, as he usually did in awkward contingencies. This time, however, he failed, and as none of the other statesmen summoned to the Quirinal—least of all the aged patriot, Paolo Carcano—would lend himself to Giolitti's game, Salandra's resignation was refused, and the King asked him to remain in power. He accepted, and Giolitti and his chief followers had to be protected by the police from the anger of the crowd, who regarded them as traitors acting in the interests of foreign Powers. On May 20th Parliament met and granted the Cabinet plenary powers by a large majority, only seventy-four members (half of them Official Socialists and the rest impenitent Giolittians) voting against the Bill. Giolitti himself retired to Piedmont, while most of his chief henchmen either disappeared or supported Salandra enthusiastically. War was declared against Austria-Hungary on the 24th.

## CHAPTER III

### ITALY AT WAR

**I**N order to appreciate Italy's position in the war we must bear in mind the long struggle between the neutralists and the interventionists. If the latter had carried the day and the former had apparently vanished, the conflict of opinion left traces behind it which bore fruit later on. A great many former neutralists were really converted to the idea that war was a necessity for Italy ; others felt that if neutrality might have proved more advantageous to Italian interests, now that war was declared it was the duty of every good Italian to put aside his own sentiments and do his best to serve his country loyally and help to win the war. But there remained a considerable number who still were opposed to the war, and who, if they dared not express their real feelings openly from fear of the consequences, bided their time. The opponents of intervention were mainly the Official Socialists and the Giolittians. The Socialists were inspired simply by anti-patriotic reasons. The Giolittians were afraid of the war from selfish motives—the fear of personal inconvenience to themselves and of interference with their business interests and with many cherished privileges, and they could not reconcile themselves to the idea that a momentous decision in the history of Italy had been taken while their chief was not in office. Others, who were not professedly Giolittians, were opposed to the war for similar selfish reasons and owing to their failure to comprehend the international situation of Italy, and spoke of it as a terrible disaster, which might be inevitable, but probably was not. There were also a few who honestly believed that the Government had made a fatal mistake, while a still larger number had no confidence in the capacity of the Government to conduct

the war, in the military qualities of the Army and in the moral strength of the nation to stand the strain of the war. The absence of a unanimous public opinion, even among the upper classes, was a grave handicap during the four years' struggle, and makes the achievement of the country still more remarkable.

At first, however, there was a general consensus of opinion that the war must be fought to a finish and internal dissensions forgotten until victory was achieved. The opening of hostilities was received with sober enthusiasm and few demonstrations. The mobilization had to a considerable extent been already carried out during the period of neutrality, and large bodies of troops were concentrated in the Veneto, so that the declaration of war did not produce a general paralysis of the economic and commercial life of the country. A remarkable feature of the situation was the excellent way in which the railways functioned : the transport of troops was effected without a hitch, the ordinary traffic was at first but little affected, and, still more wonderful, the railwaymen, whose revolutionary sentiments were notorious, did their duty manfully. The people as a whole submitted to the many restrictions which the state of war involved without much grumbling, and seemed prepared to make all the necessary sacrifices for the national cause. The various war loans were handsomely subscribed to, and all classes contributed generously to the innumerable war charities and funds for providing the troops with comforts. Even the very poor gave their mite, while the rich gave without stint. Although there were at first no striking victories, the gallant conduct of the troops gave cause for genuine satisfaction, and the organization of the Army, which had been effected during the period of neutrality through the admirable work of General Cadorna, proved far more efficient than most people had expected.

But as the months passed and no striking success was achieved, largely on account of the lack of sufficiently trained reserves, signs of weariness began to appear among the people, if not in the Army. The public was disappointed that Italian intervention had not brought about a decisive

change for the better in the general situation of the Allied Powers. If France, Britain, and Russia had just managed to hold their own before Italian intervention, this help should have brought victory appreciably nearer; as it apparently had not done so Italians began to think that the other Allies were relaxing their efforts and leaving an unduly heavy burden on Italy. These considerations were no doubt unwarranted, but the public did not know all the real facts, and above all did not realize the internal conditions of Russia, whose death-warrant had been signed on the fatal field of Gorlice shortly before Italy entered the war. In Britain and France, on the other hand, the real importance of Italian intervention at the very moment when Russia was beginning to collapse was not adequately grasped. This misunderstanding was the commencement of that breach in Allied solidarity which the Peace Conference was to widen.

These tendencies were naturally exploited by those political groups who, as we have seen, had always been, for different reasons, opposed to Italy's war policy. The interventionists themselves also began to criticize the Government for not declaring war against Germany, and in general for not repressing with sufficient energy the anti-war intrigues of the Socialists and Giolittians, as well as for its economic policy; the matter of coal imports and the mercantile marine do not seem to have been adequately handled, so that prices and freights began to rise. Although the cost of living as a whole did not increase very seriously during the war, certain articles became very much dearer—the price of coal rose sixfold—and were growing scarce. Professor Umberto Ricci, in his book "*Il fallimento della politica annonaria*," points out the many errors committed in connexion with the supply services and the rationing of certain food-stuffs, as the system usually resulted merely in increasing the consumption of other food-stuffs and in disorganizing trade generally. These errors were, however, common to all the belligerent countries, the Governments being anxious above all to prevent any increase in the cost of food, which they feared might cause discontent. Many

of these anti-economic measures might perhaps have been avoided, but others were inevitable, as neither Italy nor any other country had had experience of war on so vast a scale.

As yet opposition to the Cabinet was only tentative, and in March, 1916, Signor Salandra obtained a vote of confidence (394 to 61). But the Austrian offensive from the Trentino in May of that year, which had at one moment produced a critical situation for the Italian forces, weakened the position of the Government, and the decision of the interventionist groups, constituting the Democratic Alliance to go over to the opposition, turned the scale and brought about the fall of the Cabinet on June 10th. Although Salandra had been supported by a majority of public opinion, he had never had a Parliamentary majority and only held office on sufferance. If the Giolittians had not opposed him before, it was because they dared not do so in the face of public opinion as long as they were his only adversaries ; but when a part of the interventionists joined the opposition, although for very different motives, they took courage to attack him, and caused his fall. But instead of a Giolittian administration the new Cabinet was formed by the veteran statesman Paolo Boselli, a man of eminent qualities, above party squabbles, and esteemed by all. He retained some of the members of the late Cabinet, notably Baron Sonnino ; two Radicals (Sacchi and Fera), the Catholic Meda, the Reformist Socialists Bonomi and Bissolati, the Giolittian Colosimo and the Republican Comandini were also included. Orlando, who had been Minister of Justice under Salandra, now became Minister of the Interior, a position of great responsibility and difficulty ; it cannot be said that he fulfilled his task with success, as he initiated the fatal policy of allowing the anti-national parties a free hand to conduct their poisonous propaganda, while the war was still raging and its outcome uncertain, a policy which to a large extent nullified the advantages presented by a Cabinet comprising men of all the national parties. The Premier himself, in spite of his eminent qualities and great rectitude, was too old for the

situation, and he carried out his very arduous duties with a less firm hand than his predecessor. Nor was he supported with perfect loyalty by all his colleagues, notably by Orlando, who seems to have from the first aspired to supplant him.

It was in November, 1916, that Francesco Saverio Nitti re-emerged into public life with a speech to his constituents at Muro Lucano, after a period of semi-obscurity. He had been in Parliament since 1904, sitting as a Radical, and had served under Giolitti as Minister of Agriculture (1911-1914). A successful lawyer, he had also acquired a certain reputation as a journalist and author on economic and financial questions, but always showed superficiality in his judgments and was constantly altering his views. As a business man, certain transactions with which he was connected appear to have been open to criticism. In the above-mentioned speech he declared that Italian intervention in the war was an absolute necessity, but he added a somewhat inopportune criticism of those who had attacked Giolitti, expressing the conviction that the latter had deserved well of his country. This defence of the man who had withdrawn into the background as though he were offended with Italy for having declared war in spite of his advice, and whose followers were conducting an ignoble defeatist campaign, was severely blamed. It was obvious that he was bidding for the support of the Giolittians in view of the fall of the Boselli Cabinet, which was then believed to be imminent. In the meanwhile he accepted a mission to the United States, and he was accused of having conducted a campaign in that country in favour of his own candidature for the premiership, with the help of certain American political influences not favourable to Italian aspirations.<sup>1</sup>

The brilliant operations resulting in the capture of Gorizia in August, 1916, somewhat revived public confidence. But the enemy, although defeated, was not yet by any means put out of action, and the general position seemed hardly

<sup>1</sup> G. Brucoleri's article on Nitti in *La Rivista d'Italia*, August 15, 1920. See also A. Bernardy and V. Falorsi "La questione adriatica Vista d'oltre Oceano," Bologna, 1924.

improved substantially—I say seemed, for in reality the moral effect of the blow suffered by the Austrians was serious, and had it not been for other circumstances over which General Cadorna had no control, the Italian victory might have been the beginning of the end of the Dual Monarchy. In any case, by these terribly costly operations the Italian Army was pinning down Austria's best troops, and after the Russian defeat practically all her Army, on the bloodstained Carso and the Dolomites, and preventing the sending of reinforcements to the Germans in France. The importance of this fact was only half realized in Italy at the time, and in the other allied countries hardly at all. General Cadorna had tried on several occasions to induce the Allied staffs to send large forces to Italy, as it appeared easier, with adequate reinforcements, to break the enemy front on that sector than in France. Mr. Lloyd George, as we now know, was in favour of such a policy, but the French Government and both the British and French staffs, where the "Westerners" predominated, successfully opposed it.

The protracted struggle, the fearful losses, the absence of any decisive victory, the apparently inexhaustible resources of the Central Empires, the Russian débâcle, and the privations of the civilian population accentuated the sense of depression—*le cafard*, as the French called it—which had begun to be felt a year before. Among the troops themselves the discomfort of life in the trenches, as well as the ever-present danger, the too lengthy periods at the front which all the units, but particularly the best ones, had to undergo, the occasionally inadequate supplies, and the total absence of distractions and amusements, began to tell on the spirits of the men who had fought so gallantly for the last two years. The system applied by all belligerents at that time of keeping the largest possible number of troops in the first lines, where they were subjected to a constant drain of casualties even when no important actions were in progress, put a severe strain on the moral even of the best troops. The lack of distractions in the rest camps was due to the old military mentality of officers

brought up on the idea of short wars, throughout which every man must be kept up to concert pitch, and on the belief that amusements for the soldiers were fatal to discipline. The neutralists of all shades took advantage of Orlando's internal policy to emerge from their funkholes once more and exploit the feelings and conditions set forth above for their own purposes. The Russian revolution, which began in March, 1917, and spread rapidly, growing in intensity and horror with each successive phase, exercised considerable influence in Italy. The Socialist and Communist organizers at once proceeded to encourage the belief that if the Russian revolution, which had practically put an end to the war on the eastern front long before Brest-Litovsk, were imitated in Italy peace would be obtained on the Italian front as well. They hoped to bring about this result by means of a military mutiny, and looked forward to unlimited plunder and power for themselves. Some of them, no doubt, were in the pay of the German and Austrian secret service, as was proved by certain documents discovered by the Italian secret service in the Austrian Consulate at Zurich, but most of them were inspired merely by personal ambitions, while perhaps a few may have been sincere in their convictions. Their activities would never have attained as much success as they did had it not been for the deleterious home policy of Orlando. In spite of the censorship, the *Avanti* was allowed to conduct a hardly veiled revolutionary and defeatist campaign, while a number of local weeklies printed all over Italy followed suit. Although in theory these sheets were not supposed to enter the war zone, it was materially impossible to prevent them from reaching even the front lines, while the men who went into the base hospitals or home on leave were always able to read them. Russian Soviet propagandists were allowed to enter Italy and deliver speeches describing the earthly paradise which was being created in Russia.

Besides the Socialists, the Giolittians were also at work, and played upon the feelings of a part of the middle classes, even including some of the officers. Giolitti himself played no active part, but his gravest offence was the fact that,

while a word from him would have rallied the great majority of his adherents to the national cause, he refused to say that word. His organ, *La Stampa* of Turin, edited and owned by Senator Frassati, systematically pursued an insinuating, carefully guarded defeatist policy, daily instilling anti-patriotic poison into the minds of its numerous readers ; every unsuccessful action was magnified, every victory attenuated, every news item favourable to the enemy or which might be construed as such prominently advertised, and the Allies persistently disparaged. Leading Giolittians used similar arguments in private conversation, dropping hints that things at the front were far worse than the papers were allowed to say, that many "regrettable incidents" had been hushed up, that many generals were hopelessly incompetent, that "quantities" of soldiers had had to be shot, etc. All this propaganda, however mendacious, could not fail to produce some effect on masses of people impressed by the terrible realities of the war.

One of the most infamous acts of this policy was the phrase pronounced in the Chamber by the Socialist deputy, Claudio Treves, in July, 1917, that "next winter not another man will be in the trenches." These words spread like wildfire all over the country, from Montecitorio to the Carso and Asiago, and convinced numbers of people that the Socialist party was in a position, somehow or other, to bring about peace before the autumn leaves fell. Another pronouncement, less grave in its tendency, but proceeding from a still more authoritative source, was the Pope's definition of the war as "useless carnage," which spread the belief, especially in Catholic circles, and among a public unaffected by Socialist propaganda, that perhaps all the terrible sacrifices were for no object at all. The same lesson was taught by numbers of parish priests all over Italy, although it must be admitted that the majority of them proved good patriots and did much to keep up the moral of their flocks ; the Army chaplains did their duty admirably, many being killed in action, while large numbers won medals for military valour.

Another question which reacted unfavourably on the

public spirit was that of the *embusqués*. In modern war every soldier at the front has to be supplied by at least four men on the lines of communications and base services. It was to some extent inevitable that the officers and men entrusted with these duties should be regarded as a privileged class, and although as a rule only older men and those unfit for more active service were selected for them, it was often necessary to employ men who were fit in the depots for instructing recruits and to entrust certain specialists with technical work away from the front. As a rule the authorities were very strict, but occasionally mistakes were made, and more rarely acts of favouritism committed, and these exceptional cases were magnified by public rumour, often as a result of enemy or defeatist propaganda, until the *embusqué* craze became as widespread as the spy mania. This attitude sometimes produced serious consequences, as when the Comando Supremo or the War Ministry dared not detain some indispensable officer for duties for which he was especially fitted and sent him to a regimental command simply to avoid arousing the protests of the *embusqué*-hunters.

At a meeting of the Socialist party directorate in Florence, in the summer of 1917, a group representing a minority decided on a policy of whole-hearted solidarity with the Russian Bolsheviks and undertook to try to destroy the fighting spirit of the Italian Army, as had been done in Russia and was then being attempted in France, where many regiments had mutinied. The first outward result of this propaganda was the revolutionary outbreak at Turin in August. The pretext was the failure of the city's supply of flour on a certain day, but the men who promoted the rising were highly paid artisans in the munition and motor works who had not a shadow of a grievance, and merely wished to imitate their Russian comrades; German and Austrian secret service money was probably not unconnected with the affair. The rioting was soon quelled, but not before some fifty people had been killed and a good many wounded. A number of the men implicated in the troubles were punished by being deprived of their exemption

from active service and sent to the front, either in infantry units (the brigades which collapsed at Caporetto contained many of them), or in the mechanical transport service, which enabled them to spread revolutionary ideas over wide areas.

It must not be thought that there was no reaction against this anti-patriotic propaganda. Many private associations were formed which did excellent work. Organizations were created for supplying the troops with extra woollen clothing, comforts, amusements, etc.; the women were admirable in this connexion, both in the hospitals and in other war work. Useful propaganda was also conducted by intellectual workers who were too old or infirm to fight, by means of lectures, articles, pamphlets, personal service, etc., both among the troops and the civilian population. But all this was not enough, as in war time private initiative can only serve to complete the action of the Government and must, further, be supported by it, whereas in this phase of the war the Government's action was in many fields non-existent and in others inadequate. That Orlando was a patriot after his own lights no one doubted, but he could never shed the mentality of his Giolittian origin, and, although well-meaning, he was a wordy rhetorician and always preferred to follow the line of least resistance.

There had been some indications that all was not well with a part of the Army in the summer of 1917, and certain units had given signs of diminished military spirit, notably some of the troops who had fought on Monte Ortigara and in the operations against Monte Hermada north of Trieste; the offensive in the latter sector, after a promising beginning, had been held up owing to the failure of some regiments in the face of enemy counter-attacks. General Cadorna had called the attention of the Government to this state of things in his letters of June 2, 4, 7 and August 18, 1917, full of grave warnings. But the Minister of the Interior ignored them, apparently from fear of getting into trouble with the Socialists, whom he hoped to "kill by kindness." If Cadorna is to be blamed, apart from certain purely military errors rightly or wrongly ascribed to him, it is

because he did not resign when he saw his warnings disregarded. But a commander-in-chief in war time is apt to look upon resignation, however justified by other considerations, as a dereliction of duty.

On October 23, 1917, the Austro-German offensive was launched at Caporetto and broke through the Italian lines—the defeatist propaganda, in addition to some serious military blunders, had done its work. A part of the Second Army, which had been most infected, gave way, thus obliging the undefeated Third and Fourth Armies to fall back; 300,000 prisoners, 2,500 guns, and vast quantities of stores were captured, and the enemy advanced to the Piave, occupying not only the Austrian territories which the Italians had held for two years, but also the whole of the provinces of Udine and Belluno and parts of those of Treviso, Venice, and Vicenza. The city of Venice was only thirty kilometres from the front lines, and all Italy was in an agony of suspense, expecting its fall from day to day, together with that of other important towns, industrial centres, and rich agricultural districts. Depression and gloom spread throughout the country, made more terrible by the throngs of refugees flying panic-stricken before the invaders, who murdered, raped, plundered, and burnt their way onward.

It seemed impossible, even to many Italians, that after such a crushing defeat the Army and people could ever recover. But the impossible happened. The feeling of disappointment at the length of the war, the hopeless feeling engendered by the collapse of Russia, and the inability of the French and British to achieve any tangible success on the western front, the slowness of the Americans, the hope of a peace by compromise and pro-German sentiments, all gave way before the determination to resist at all costs to the very end. Every one, from the King to the meanest peasant, realized that the new lines on the Asiago plateau and the Piave *must* be held. The broken remnants of the Army re-formed, and the universal watchword was *Di qui non passeranno*. The successful defence of these positions, prepared by General Cadorna, between November 10 and November 22 ranks as one of the finest achievements of

the whole war. The King's example was particularly fine. Ever since the beginning of the war he had been at the front, constantly visiting the trenches in the hottest positions, and although nominally Commander-in-Chief he never interfered in the conduct of military operations. After Caporetto he multiplied his activities a thousandfold, and his proclamation of November 19th was a trumpet call to the whole nation. "As neither My House nor My People, united in a single spirit, have ever wavered in the face of danger, so even now We look adversity in the face without flinching. . . . Citizens and soldiers, be a single Army ! All cowardice is treachery, all discord is treachery, all recrimination is treachery !" Another man who did much to rouse the country was the soldier-poet D'Annunzio. Although well over military age, he had volunteered for active service at the beginning of the war ; at first in the trenches with the infantry, he afterwards joined the Navy as an honorary naval officer and took part in the most dangerous expeditions on destroyers and submarines, and finally covered himself with glory as a flying corps officer. He now helped to revive public confidence by the marvellous eloquence of his speeches and articles, as well as by his personal example of courage.

As soon as the extent of the Caporetto disaster was realized, the Boselli Cabinet resigned (October 26th), and on October 30th Orlando became Prime Minister. Baron Sonnino still remained at the Foreign Office, and was the chief pillar of the new administration. Its weakest element was Nitti, who had only just failed to be chosen Premier. Immediately before Caporetto he had made a speech showing that he obviously aspired to Boselli's succession, being the leader of the lukewarm supporters of the war, with a programme for the revision of war aims and the renunciation of Italy's Adriatic aspirations. From the very first he initiated a policy of sabotage of the Cabinet of which he was a member, in the hope of ousting Orlando and taking his place ; even abroad, both personally and by means of his adherents, he systematically disparaged the Premier and his other colleagues, with results very dele-

terious to his country's interests.<sup>1</sup> The choice of Orlando as Premier, while it was his policy as Minister of the Interior which was at least in part responsible for Caporetto, might indeed appear inopportune, but it was not for these reasons that Nitti tried to undermine the Cabinet, and indeed Orlando himself, once he was in power, realized the full gravity of the situation and did much to retrieve his past errors. He helped to mobilize the moral and material resistance of the country and strongly supported private enterprise. The Government granted large sums in aid of the refugees from the invaded territories (4·4 per cent of the total area of Italy), and 35,000,000 lire were raised by public subscription. The presence of the refugees all over the country did much to stiffen the determination of the people, and very valuable work was accomplished by the newly formed association of disabled soldiers (*mutilati di guerra*), the creation of which was largely due to the heroic officer Marquis Paulucci di Calboli, who, although hopelessly crippled by his wounds, toured the country advocating strenuous resistance, until he died after protracted suffering.

In Parliament, immediately after Caporetto, a number of deputies and senators belonging to the various interventionist groups constituted themselves into the *Fascio parlamentare di difesa nazionale*, to organize and co-ordinate the patriotic forces of the nation. It comprised 150 deputies and about as many senators. One of its first tasks was to counteract the pernicious activities of the *Unione parlamentare*, also constituted during these days and composed of neutralists of various shades who, with the pretext of defending Parliamentary prerogatives against the supposed dictatorial conduct of the Government, were in reality trying to undermine its influence and weaken its war policy. The *Unione parlamentare* gradually faded away, while the *Fascio parlamentare* remained, and exercised increasing influence over public affairs. Its name signifies bunch or bundle, from the fasces, the symbol of the Roman lictors, and refers to its character as an association of persons

<sup>1</sup> Brucoleri, *op. cit.*

closely bound together aiming at a single object. Outside Parliament *Fasci nazionali* began to be formed here and there with similar objects, but as long as the war lasted they could not develop any great activity, as the men sympathizing with these ideas were nearly all fighting or lying wounded in the military hospitals.

The reorganization of the Army was the work of the new Chief of the Staff, General Armando Diaz,<sup>1</sup> ably assisted by his two seconds-in-command, Generals Badoglio and Giardino. Not only were all the losses in men, guns, and material rapidly made good, but a great deal was done for the comfort of the troops ; units at the front were given longer periods of repose in the rest camps, leave was prolonged, recreation huts were erected all over the war zone, every kind of distraction was provided for the men, from theatrical performances and concerts by the greatest artists to indoor games, and rations were improved in spite of the great difficulties of supply. The people at home were being literally underfed in order that the men at the front should want nothing, but all bore the sacrifice cheerfully, without grousing. Private initiative in the matter of propaganda, now adequately supported by the Government, redoubled its efforts.

A few words must be said about the assistance afforded by the Allies, as the matter was to have a considerable bearing on future relations between the latter and Italy. At the time of the Caporetto disaster there were no Allied troops in Italy (except a few excellent sanitary units), as the British heavy batteries had been withdrawn some time previously. But both France and Britain now came forward generously to assist Italy in her dire need, and at once hurried fresh forces to the Italian front ; these contingents amounted to six British and five French divisions (afterwards gradually reduced), all of them excellent. Marshal Foch also visited the Comando Supremo to assist with his valuable advice, but he found that General Cadorna (then still in command) had already carried out practically all the measures which he suggested. The arrival of the Allied

<sup>1</sup> Who succeeded General Cadorna soon after Caporetto.

forces exercised a most inspiriting effect on the Italian troops and public. But it should be remembered that no Allied forces actually came into the fighting line until the enemy had been definitely held up by Italian effort alone between November 10th and November 22nd. This fact is apt to be forgotten in Britain and France—not by the gallant British and French soldiers who afterwards fought so splendidly on Italian soil, where many of them lie buried, but by the stay-at-home public and the Press. The frequent statements made in English and French papers that it was the Allied contingents which saved the Italian situation, as if they alone had held up the enemy, caused great irritation in Italy, and explains much of the subsequent bad feeling against the Allies; a part of the Italian Press retorted by denying that the latter had contributed anything at all to the defence of Italy, which was equally untrue and unfair, as British and French units not only relieved worn-out Italian units from December onwards, but also played an admirable part in the great battles of June and October to November, 1918, and in other lesser engagements. It should be remembered, on the other hand, that Italy sent a number of troops to fight in France. Some 70,000 men of the labour battalions had already been doing valuable, if not showy, work behind the French lines, but when the great German offensive of the spring of 1918 broke through and created a very dangerous situation General Albricci's Army Corps was sent to France and greatly distinguished itself at the battle of Bligny, which saved Reims (in July), as well as in other engagements. The number of Italians killed in France was several times larger than that of the British and French in Italy, although the Italian contingent was far smaller and engaged for a shorter time. This is not said in any ungenerous or unfriendly spirit, but in order to explain Italian indignation at the failure in certain Allied quarters to recognize the extent of Italy's effort, and the attitude of Italian public opinion with regard to inter-Allied relations after the Armistice.

The internal economic situation was difficult enough, and

the policy of certain high officials of demagogic tendencies and notorious incompetence did not improve matters. Bread, rice, macaroni paste, meat, sugar, and many other food-stuffs were strictly rationed. The bread ration for the civilian population was reduced to 250 grammes daily per head, meat could be bought only twice a week, and the manufacture of cakes and sweetmeats was prohibited. Coal, which had risen to 700 or 800 lire per ton, was so scarce that the railway service for passengers was greatly curtailed, the restaurant cars ceased to run, and the trains were not heated. The size of newspapers was strictly limited so as to avoid the wastage of paper. On the other hand, war industries, under the able organizing hand of General Dallolio, Minister of Munitions, and with the bold and patriotic efforts of the Italian industrials, assumed an enormous development, and the country became one huge arsenal.<sup>1</sup> But these war industries provided one of the elements of future labour trouble. The workmen employed in them were, as we have seen, exempt from active military service, but instead of being subjected to military discipline and paid like ordinary soldiers they received wages far in excess of those of the pre-war period, and in excess of the actual increase of the cost of living. Every demand for a rise in wages, often accompanied by threats of strikes, was granted without demur, but only served to whet the insatiable appetites of the workmen. Soldiers returning from the front on leave or wounded, after endless months in the trenches, exposed to every danger and discomfort, paid at the rate of fifty centesimi a day plus their food, contemplated the unedifying spectacle of munition workers, earning from ten to thirty lire per day for eight hours' work, living in their own homes, their wives and elder children often earning extra wages as well. Nor was the money thus acquired wisely spent ; the munition workers were proverbial for their extravagance in buying expensive food and unlimited drink, and silk clothes for their women-folk. At the same time the war profiteers were beginning to be unpleasantly conspicuous, and at a time when the

<sup>1</sup> There were at one time no less than 6,000 munition works in Italy.

great majority of the people were suffering real hardships for the sake of the soldiers at the front these *pescicani* (sharks), as they were popularly called, were seen in the most expensive restaurants and hotels, consuming large quantities of costly food and wines, often obtained by contraband, or showing off their fashionable clothes, furs, and jewels. Curiously enough, it was among the highly paid munition workers that revolutionary Socialism was most rampant, while the war profiteers and others who indirectly made money out of the war frequently expressed the most abject defeatist sentiments. These phenomena were, as we shall see, greatly intensified after the war, but they began before Caporetto, and laid the foundations of that general discontent among large classes of the population which made the subsequent Bolshevik madness possible.

During the period following the recovery from the terrible shock of Caporetto, the public spirit was higher than it had ever been before. The steel of the nation was being tempered in the burning fiery furnace of dire necessity. Even a great many Giolittians and ex-neutralists were at last converted, and loyally tried to do their bit. Unfortunately, there were still some impenitent anti-patriots working underground to sap the strength of the nation ; but instead of hinting at further enemy successes and at hushed-up disasters to Italian arms, they began to promote ill-feeling between Italy and her Allies. The attitude of the Yugoslavs and of their friends in Britain and France provided material for this campaign. Giolitti still kept in the background, but his organ, *La Stampa*, began to hint at the necessity that, as soon as the war was over, a new Cabinet should come into power, presided over by some statesman of wide experience of political life and not blinded by the chauvinism of the men responsible for Italian intervention ; it was not necessary to be a Sherlock Holmes to guess who this heaven-born genius was. But the most dangerous element in the situation was the presence within the Cabinet of F. S. Nitti. He was already, as we have seen, intriguing to oust Orlando from power, and was also giving evidence

of his jealousy of the Army which was afterwards to become the keynote of his policy.

In the spring of 1918 was concluded the so-called Pact of Rome, between Italy and the delegates of the nationalities oppressed by Austria-Hungary. The object of this gathering was to weaken the internal organization of the Dual Monarchy. But it resulted in a compromise with the Yugoslavs, which, although it was no regular treaty concluded by the Italian or any other recognized Government, made difficulties for the future settlement. Orlando, with his somewhat superficial mentality, was taken in by the picturesqueness of the idea, and also affected by his luke-warm faith in the possibility of an Italian military victory, and he gave the congress his semi-official blessing, little realizing what the consequences would be ; the mistake was that, apart from the merits of the agreement, the pact was concluded between more or less official representatives of Italy and persons who did not as yet represent anything at all, but some of whom were afterwards to become heads of Governments.

The great German offensive of March, 1918, produced much depression in Italy and provided further material for pro-German propaganda. But the public was soon more preoccupied with the prospect of an enemy offensive on a large scale on the Italian front. This time the intelligence service, which had been thoroughly reorganized, proved equal to the situation, and the staff was informed in good time of the details of the coming attack. The latter was launched on June 15th from the Asiago plateau to the sea, and although the fighting was exceptionally hard the enemy were beaten back at all points, and were unable to retain any of the ground which they won at the beginning of the offensive. This was the first great Allied victory in 1918 ; public confidence rose once more, and the feeling that the final victory was inevitable began to grow.

The period between the battle of the Piave and that of Vittorio Veneto was in a sense a peculiarly critical one for Italy. On July 15th the Germans launched their third and last offensive in France, which three days later was held

up, and on the 18th Marshal Foch commenced his successful counter-offensive. On August 8th Marshal Haig attacked and drove back the Germans. Thenceforth the Allies on the western front pressed gradually forward, driving the enemy from line to line. In Italy the public was beginning to ask anxiously what the Italian Army would do now. From a strictly military point of view it might have been enough to pin down practically the whole Austro-Hungarian Army and prevent it from sending reinforcements to the Germans, in itself a most valuable service to the common cause. But if the end were to come and the enemy forced to sue for peace while the Austrians were still on the Piave, the whole nation would have felt deeply humiliated. It is true that the defeat of the Germans would have involved that of the Austrians, forcing them to evacuate the Veneto and perhaps even the Trentino and Trieste. But what would Italy's international situation have been at the Peace Conference in these circumstances? Her moral position would have been disastrous in the face of the Allies, and she could never have expected a sympathetic hearing for any of her national aspirations if they came into conflict with the interests of any other Allied Power. The Government, especially Baron Sonnino, realized this, and insisted that an Italian offensive be launched at the earliest possible moment; all the best part of the nation took the same view. But there were the faint-hearted who doubted of success, and even among the generals there were some who hesitated at the idea of a heavy sacrifice of lives which might perhaps be avoided. Nitti, although a Cabinet Minister, strongly opposed the idea of an offensive, and even toured the front in order to dissuade the general staff and the army commanders from attempting it. He professed to wish to keep the Army intact for post-war purposes, which in itself would have hardly been playing the game, but he was probably inspired by his morbid jealousy of the Army and by fear lest a striking Italian victory should make it too popular and give too much influence to the men who had fought, thereby preventing him from dominating the country through the neutralists.

Fortunately this propaganda was successfully resisted—a success which constitutes one of Sonnino's many merits—and the offensive was decided upon. The preparations left nothing to be desired, and Generals Diaz, Badoglio, and Giardino worked out the plans with the greatest care. In order to emphasize the inter-Allied character of the operations the command of one of the attacking armies was entrusted to General the Earl of Cavan and that of another to the French General Graziani, although both these forces contained Italian as well as British and French units, while other British, French, and also Czechoslovak and American troops were scattered about among the other armies commanded by Italian generals. The whole Army consisted of fifty-one Italian, three British, two French and one Czechoslovak divisions and one United States regiment, against seventy-three Austro-Hungarian divisions. The attack was to have been launched about the middle of October, but it was delayed, on account of the bad weather; until the 24th—a year and a day after Caporetto. It ended in a complete victory of the Italian armies, and by November 3rd "what had been one of the most powerful Armies in the world," as General Diaz's victory *communiqué* states, "was annihilated." The same day at 3 p.m. the armistice between the Italian and Austro-Hungarian armies was signed. At that moment Italian troops were well beyond the old frontier on the western and central sectors, and Trento was occupied, while a mixed force under General Petitti di Koreto, transported by sea from Venice, had landed at Trieste, the *optatus alveus* of the last fifty years. Rapidly the Friuli, the Cadore, and the Carnia were cleared of the remnants of the enemy Army, now in full rout, and soon afterwards the Italians were on the Brenner Pass, and also occupied the Gorizia district, Istria, and North Dalmatia, thus reaching the frontiers assigned to Italy by the Treaty of London.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ARMISTICE

THE great victory of Vittorio Veneto was received with enthusiastic rejoicing throughout Italy. Not only was it a magnificent military exploit in itself, but it helped to make the surrender of Germany inevitable, as Bavaria was now open to the Italian armies, and the conclusion of an armistice became a necessity for the Empire if a foreign invasion and fighting on its own soil were to be avoided. The German armistice was in fact concluded on November 11th, and with it the war ended. But Italy's losses had been extremely heavy. With a total population of 38,000,000 (including the African colonies), she had lost some 600,000 killed and over 1,000,000 wounded (slightly wounded excluded), of whom 220,000 were permanently disabled. The fact that Italy had entered the war ten months later than the other Powers renders these figures even more significant, and the losses produced a deep impression on public opinion during the discussion of the peace terms, for it came to be believed that neither their absolute nor their relative value were adequately appreciated in the other Allied countries ; this fact helps to explain the bitterness with which the conduct of the latter was often judged, and it contributed to create that state of general discontent and exasperation which made the subsequent internal disorders possible.

Hardly had the Armistice been concluded when Italy found herself faced by a conflict with the Yugoslavs, who seemed to have inherited Austria's rôle as the unfriendly eastern neighbour. To understand this situation we must bear in mind the dual part played by the Yugoslavs in the war. One part of that nation had indeed fought gallantly on the side of the Allies, and it was the Italians who had

saved the miserable remnants of the defeated Serbian Army in Albania. But another part had remained loyal subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy to the very end of the war, and only after the Italians had definitely beaten the Imperial and Royal Armies, did they appear in the guise of allies and demand as a right a revision of the Pact of London at Italy's expense. But it was not so much the Yugoslav attitude which irritated Italian opinion as the support which it found in Britain, France, and America. The two former Governments, it is true, grudgingly admitted their obligations under the Treaty, but President Wilson declared that he knew nothing of "secret agreements" and did not consider himself bound by them; the Press in all three countries showed itself very unfriendly to Italy. There were no doubt reasons on both sides, and the Italian statesmen, people and Press were not blameless, but it cannot be gainsaid that while Britain and France obtained all that they wanted and annexed large and valuable provinces and colonies, or distributed them among their minor vassals, Italy was accused of Imperialism merely for demanding a few small districts on her own borders, containing highly civilized Italian communities; every Italian claim, however just, had to be fought for acrimoniously, *unguis et rostris*, before it obtained a grudging and incomplete recognition. There was, moreover, a tendency among the Allies to underestimate Italy's effort in the war, and its value for the common cause, to dispute the figures of her losses (which actually proved superior to the original estimates), and to attribute insufficient importance to the immense economic strain caused by war expenditure. Then the Fiume question arose to complicate matters still further; the ineffable Wilson took it up as the touchstone of his so-called "new diplomacy," and while he was ready to give way to many of the French and British claims, he was as adamant when those of Italy in the Adriatic were concerned. But throughout the protracted wrangle over the peace terms Italy's international situation was weakened by her internal conditions and by the division of opinion at home over

her policy in Paris, while affairs in Paris reacted on the internal situation.

All these circumstances resulted in an ever-deeper sense of disappointment and disillusion among all classes as to the consequences of the war. The Giolittians and ex-neutralists began to say "I told you so" in different tones, and were encouraged in their attacks on all those who were responsible for Italian intervention, while the interventionists themselves considered that Italy had been badly let down by her Allies ; now that the censorship and other war restrictions were removed, the Socialists and Communists took advantage of the general discontent to initiate a campaign of violent aggression against the Government, the Monarchy, the Army, and the middle classes, which from the first encountered no adequate resistance. The prestige of the Government, and indeed of the State, was thus greatly shaken both at home and abroad, just when it was faced with the very difficult task of bridging the gulf between the state of war and the state of peace.

On November 26, 1918, the Treasury Minister, Signor Nitti, presented his Budget to the Chamber, which showed a deficit of 6,271,000,000 lire, and although the Cabinet obtained a vote of confidence the next day (325 to 35), it was obvious to all that the financial problem was most serious and urgent. It could only be solved by five series of measures, viz. (1) the Army must be demobilized and military expenditure greatly reduced, (2) all the war paraphernalia of restrictions on trade and subsidies must be got rid of at once, (3) the most rigid economics must be introduced, (4) new taxes must be imposed and old ones increased, (5) new loans must be issued. Total demobilization, however, was as yet impossible, as it was still necessary to keep considerable forces under arms, on account both of the unsettled frontier questions and commitments in the East, and of the internal situation. On December 12th the first partial demobilization order was issued, but it only applied to men born from 1878 to 1884, and military expenditure continued to be a heavy burden. But in the field of war restrictions the Government was unnecessarily slow in

clearing them away, partly on account of the general cumbrousness of the administrative machine, but partly also because these restrictions had given birth to innumerable new organizations and well-paid jobs which the officials concerned were reluctant to give up, and which were profitable to a small class of business men ; consequently every form of obstruction was resorted to by the interested parties to prevent, or at least delay, the suppression of useless offices, and the Government preferred to follow the line of least resistance. The result was that trade, industry and agriculture continued to be hampered, goods were scarce and ever more expensive, and every form of economic activity was paralysed. Another element in the situation was that the war had established Government control over many forms of industry and trade—the importation of coal, wheat, and other goods, exports of all kinds, many manufactures, and even the internal trade in many articles. This control often fell into the hands of officials with tendencies in favour of State Socialism and sympathies towards Socialist ideas ; the Socialist party naturally desired this state of things to continue, both because it was in conformity with its own views and because a number of its adherents were making a very good thing out of it. All this went on at the very moment when the need for reconstruction and increased output were most urgent to repair the ravages caused by the war and make up for four years of reduced production.

The Fascio parlamentare did not consider its task at an end with the Armistice, and it tried to induce the Government to dissolve the Chamber and hold the new elections immediately after the end of hostilities, while the victory feeling was still in the air, the more so as such a course would have been in conformity with constitutional practice. But Signor Orlando was afraid of Socialist opposition and refused. Government was therefore carried on with the old Chamber, the majority of which was still Giolittian, and whose heart had never been in the war. The Premier was soon to discover how little the Socialist party could be relied upon, even when it was doped with concessions. The

unsatisfactory course of the peace negotiations, and the impression, true in part, although no doubt exaggerated by a nervous public opinion, that Britain and France were deliberately sacrificing Italy in order to secure Wilson's support for certain of their own war aims, intensified Italian irritation, not only against the Allies in Paris, but also against the Italian Government and Peace Delegation, who were accused of not having adequately defended the country's interests.

Economic difficulties had been serious enough while the war lasted, but then every one was determined to bear up against them in the confidence that when once the victory was won all would be well ; instead of which, prices, which had not risen very considerably during the war, except for certain articles, now began to soar up to double and treble what they had been before. Many goods, such as coal, wheat, meat, sugar, etc. became very scarce owing to the lack of tonnage, decreased output in the producing countries, and the immensely increased demand from countries which had been cut off from the sources of supply while the war lasted. Government restrictions and interference, which were continued with a view to meeting the difficulties, only intensified them. The exchange, which had been artificially maintained at a figure not very much below par while the war lasted, now began to rise rapidly, and the further issues of paper money, which had been decreed to meet a part of the war expenditure, still further depreciated the lira ; and the pound rose from thirty-seven lire to fifty, sixty and even higher. This fact in itself was one of the chief causes of the increased cost of living, but here too the Government's measures only made matters worse, for by introducing, or rather continuing and intensifying, the *calmieri* or regulations for limiting prices, they caused goods first to disappear and then reappear at greatly enhanced prices ; every householder had to compound with his tradesmen to obtain supplies at all, paying them at a much higher rate than the *calmiere*. Large subsidies continued to be paid to idlers, who were thus encouraged in idleness, while bread, under State regulation, was sold below cost so as to produce the

impression that at least that article was still cheap ; but this improvident policy largely increased the Budget deficit, which had to be met out of increased taxation and further issues of paper money. In a word, the Government in the post-war period seems to have done all the things which it ought not to have done, and to have left undone the things which it ought to have done. Other Governments no doubt behaved likewise, but that was small consolation to the Italians, and as they were poorer than the British, the Americans, or the French, the consequences for them were harder to bear.

Perhaps the greatest error of the Government was the diffusion of false economic principles. It tended to attribute all the difficulties of the time to wicked speculators and middlemen, who sold goods at higher prices than they were worth out of pure greed ; even the rise in the exchange was attributed to speculation, and attempts were made to prevent the export of Italian currency. The behaviour of certain war profiteers did undoubtedly contribute to intensify the general discontent. They were not pleasant to look at, and their wives were even less so. Most of them had got rich through the circumstances of the war, often quite independently of their own business ability. As a rule they were unaccustomed to the possession of great wealth and did not know how to spend it except in vulgar display. The gibes at these men were innumerable and often deserved, and in many cases their money had been acquired dishonestly. But the chief injury which they wrought was their ostentatious exhibition of wealth in the presence of those who had lost their dear ones in the war. The Government's attempt under Signor Giolitti to confiscate war profits, while it was often evaded, also proved an unfair hardship and injustice to those manufacturers who had patriotically taken great risks, in spite of Government discouragement, and were able to make good the Army losses of material after Caporetto ; these men were placed on the same footing as the worst profiteers.

The general relaxation of discipline and moral restraint after years of war-harness produced in all classes an inordinate love of enjoyment and luxury, and if the profiteers

indulged in an orgy of extravagance, the industrial workers squandered their large earnings in drink, expensive food, and useless finery, without putting anything by for the inevitable hard times. Nevertheless, it was the latter who were most discontented and who inveighed most bitterly against the war, which most of them had only seen from the inside of munition factories. Wages had greatly increased during the war, while prices, as we have seen, had only slightly risen ; it was after the Armistice that prices had begun to mount rapidly, and although they had not caught up with the increased wages, the workers felt defrauded because they were not as well off as they had been during the war years. They now began to show an ever-increasing repugnance for work, their output was reduced and deteriorated in quality, and if their ever-fresh demands were not immediately acceded to they went on strike ; at the same time they refused to contribute anything in the way of direct taxation, whereas the lower middle class was overburdened by it. As an instance of this, Professor Pantaleoni, in the preface to his admirable book "*Bolscevismo italiano*" (p. xvii), quotes the case of a Milanese tramwayman who sent a petition to the Socialist municipality against the injunction to pay the family tax, and in order to explain how impossible it was for him to pay any taxes at all he presented his family budget ; this showed that he was earning 9,125 lire per annum, while the joint earnings of all the members of his family amounted to 32,225 lire, and their expenditure to 30,046.20, including no less than 3,000 lire for wine !

The Socialist leaders, labour organizers, and secretaries of the trade unions and Camere del Lavoro, and all the other hosts of parasites who batten on labour, exploited this state of mind to promote the interests of their party and their own. They encouraged the working masses in the belief that as they had been made to fight for the sole benefit of the capitalists it was now their right to obtain an ever-increasing share in the nation's wealth. The example of Russia exerted immense influence, and was made the most of ; the extreme Socialist leaders, Serrati, Bombacci, Lazzari,

etc., were in close touch with Moscow, and by depicting the conditions of Russia as those of an earthly paradise they convinced large numbers of workers that if a similar regime were introduced into Italy every one would be happy without any necessity for work. Even the more moderate Socialists, who did not desire a revolution or who disbelieved in its possibility, such as Turati and Treves, were too much afraid of losing popularity with the masses to speak their minds openly. Against this propaganda the Government, whose activities were monopolized by the Peace Conference, offered no resistance, while the really producing classes—the bourgeoisie, the peasants, and the workmen who worked, and who were the majority—were too much harassed by economic difficulties and by the paralysing influence of State interference in trade to take any initiative against the Maximalists or Bolsheviks, as the extremists now began to call themselves.

Funds for revolutionary propaganda were not lacking. During the war they had been supplied by the enemy secret service, often through the German and Austrian Socialist parties ; now the wind was raised through Russia, or by blackmailing the rich and levying toll on the earnings of the workmen. Socialist orators not only constantly denounced the iniquities of the bourgeoisie, but persistently told it that it was no use struggling as its time was up, and this sort of hypnotism was not wholly without effect. By dint of being told day after day that they were "rotters," that they had no guts in them, that they were inevitably going to be wiped out, the more fainthearted bourgeois began to believe that it was true. Some very unedifying instances of bourgeois and even capitalists professing Socialist opinions and contributing to Socialist party funds out of pure funk were seen in Italy, as indeed in England and other countries ; respectable middle-class householders coquetted with Bolshevism and said that "after all, there may be something in it," simply in the vain hope of conciliating the extremists against the day of their possible triumph.<sup>1</sup> This attitude was manifested in official circles

<sup>1</sup> A Milanese capitalist, professing Socialist sentiments, openly disported the Bolshevik sickle and hammer emblem as a tie-pin, in diamonds !

for political purposes, and although it was not by any means general, it did not fail to offer yet further encouragement to the promoters of revolution.

The epidemic of strikes, which broke out immediately after the Armistice, was closely connected with the activities of the Socialist party. In the general disorder of economic life caused by the war there were indeed legitimate grievances to be righted ; the feeling of weariness and moral shell-shock after the war and the disappointment that the end of hostilities had not at once re-established general prosperity, can explain and to some extent excuse the agitations which permeated the labouring classes. But the movement would never have attained the revolutionary, anti-patriotic and criminal character which it soon assumed but for the action of the Socialists. On December 22, 1918, the Socialist party held its first post-war congress at Bologna, where a general plan of campaign was drawn up ; immediately afterwards the Postal Employees' Committee of Action threatened a postal and telegraph strike, which was only averted because the Government promised higher wages. This was the first warning of a series of political strikes in the public services promoted by the Socialists, with the object of disorganizing the economic life of the country and thus facilitating revolution, although the majority of the employees supporting it were simply attracted by the hope of improving their own conditions, even at the cost of the community as a whole. It was also the first, but by no means the last, instance of the Government's surrender to threats. Numerous other strikes occurred during the winter of 1918-1919, but they were mostly of an economic character. On April 10th, however, a twenty-four hours' strike was proclaimed in Rome because the authorities had dared to forbid a manifestation in favour of the tyrants ruling over Russia ; here we have an instance of the purely political strike and of the direct influence which the conditions in Russia exercised over the revolutionary leaders in Italy. For many years the Socialists and Anarchists had promoted agitation, but Russia now supplied a working model of the State as they would like to establish it in

Italy. A similar demonstration was held in Milan on the 13th : a few persons were wounded in a scuffle ; a patriotic cortège was fired on near the offices of the *Avanti* and this led to a counter-demonstration of patriotic young men, who wrecked the premises. The General Confederation of Labour, which, although not affiliated to the Socialist party had contracted an alliance with it and acted in ever closer collaboration with it, ordered a protest strike of all its members in consequence. Work was suspended in some towns only, and in Rome the agitation ended in a patriotic counter-demonstration on the 17th. On May 4th the railwaymen of the secondary lines and the tramwaymen (80,000 men in all) struck for higher wages, and a couple of days later the National Seamen's Federation, of which the notorious Giulietti, an ex-captain of the mercantile marine, held up an Italian steamer conveying munitions to the British troops in Russia ; this form of agitation was part of a general plot engineered by international Bolshevik organizations throughout Europe to prevent military action against Soviet Russia. But the holding up of steamers was not only practised for political purposes : it was resorted to as a means for extorting higher wages or free drinks for the crews, or for obtaining an increase in the numbers of men on board so as to reduce work, and the demands were made at the last moment just as the ship was about to weigh anchor. A refusal meant a delay of one or more days, at vast expense to the owners and shippers, while sailing under the conditions extorted rendered shipping ever less profitable. The dock labourers, who were affiliated to the Seamen's Union, also co-operated in these movements, so that the whole maritime trade of Italy came to be practically controlled by the executive committee of the union. The result was to divert a great deal of trade from Italian ports, especially from Genoa, to the advantage of Marseilles, Cetve, and Rotterdam. This subject will be dealt with later in more detail.

In the meanwhile the Peace Conference dragged on without coming to any decision. After the outrageous behaviour of President Wilson in connexion with Fiume

the Italian delegation returned to Rome on April 24th, and its action was endorsed by the mass of public opinion both in Parliament and the country. When Signor Orlando recounted the story of the Fiume negotiations in the Chamber, he obtained a vote of confidence of 382 to 40. At that moment the Cabinet found support even in certain Socialist quarters, and among the *Rinunciatari*, as the followers of Signor Bissolati were called, because on ethnical grounds they advocated the retrocession of the Alto Adige to Austria and of Dalmatia and parts of the Gorizia district to Yugoslavia ; Bissolati himself, who had resigned his seat in the Cabinet on account of these views, soon after the Armistice, confirmed his conviction that Fiume should belong to Italy as its population is Italian. At the same time Italian labour organizations, in reply to appeals from the British Labour party and the French C.G.T. to uphold Wilson's policy, declared that they could not accept a one-sided Wilsonism, unbending towards Italy but accommodating where the interests of Britain, France and even Poland and Yugoslavia were concerned. In Paris the other delegations were very anxious that the Italians should return, because, although the treaty with Germany might have been concluded even without Italy's signature, the absence of the latter would have greatly strengthened Germany's position ; President Wilson too was particularly desirous that Italy should adhere to the Covenant of the League of Nations, as without Italy the success of the scheme would have been impossible. Yet Orlando failed to take advantage of this state of things, and on May 3rd the delegation returned to Paris without having secured the guarantees in favour of Italy's claims which the Italian people believed that he had in his hands. On the contrary, on reaching Paris, Orlando found that Italy's diplomatic position was worse than it had been before the delegation's departure. The German treaty was ready and in its present draft contained certain modifications concerning reparations, introduced while Orlando was away and against which Signor Crespi, the assistant delegate, who had remained behind, had protested in vain. Orlando also

learned that Greece had been authorized to occupy the Smyrna area, which had been formally promised to Italy by the St. Jean de Maurienne agreement of April, 1917; this decision had been taken at the instance of Mr. Lloyd George and President Wilson, in the case of the latter mainly with the object of humiliating and exasperating Italy because of the bitter and scurrilous attacks against himself in the Italian Press. Incidentally this policy, light-heartedly adopted by the elder statesmen to satisfy Wilson's spite, was to cost Britain and France, and indeed Western Europe as a whole, very dear, to create a new war in the Near East lasting for over three years, and to weaken the prestige of the great Powers throughout Islam.

The German treaty was now definitely drafted, handed over to the German delegation, and eventually signed, but no solution of the Adriatic question had been arrived at, and, early in June, Orlando returned to Rome to inform Parliament of the further course of the negotiations. Disappointment had in the meanwhile increased, and hostility to the Cabinet had become more general. The Fascio parlamentare had its own representatives in the peace delegation, in the persons of Senator Scialoja, the deputies Salandra and Barzilai, and some others, but it had been unable to influence the Premier either in the diplomatic field, or in favour of a more virile home policy. Baron Sonnino, who should have been responsible for the conduct of Italy's foreign policy and who had the support of the Fascio, was almost ousted by Orlando, who wished to keep all the more important negotiations in his own hands and who often followed a line opposed to that of his Minister for Foreign Affairs. The Fascio consequently withdrew its support and joined the Opposition. On June 19th the Government was beaten by 259 votes to 78, and resigned. But the Fascio derived no advantage from Orlando's fall. It had opposed him because of his vacillating policy at home and abroad, but his successor was Signor Nitti, who was to follow a line of conduct even more diametrically opposed to the views of the Fascio than that of Orlando had been.

## CHAPTER V

### NITTI AND THE DOMINATION OF THE SOCIALISTS

THE new Cabinet was composed as follows : Nitti (Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior), Tittoni (Minister for Foreign Affairs), Luigi Rossi (Colonies), Mortara (Justice), General Albricci (War), Admiral Sechi (Marine), Tedesco (Finance), Schanzer (Treasury), Alfredo Baccelli (Education), Pantano (Public Works), De Vito (Transport), Visocchi (Agriculture), Dante Ferraris (Industry, Commerce, Labour, and Supplies), Chimienti (Posts and Telegraphs), Nava (Liberated Territories). The general character of the administration was Democratic-Radical, although it comprised some members, such as Senator Tittoni, whose tendencies were more Conservative. Signor Tedesco and Senator Schanzer represented the Giolittians, although Schanzer eventually broke away from his former chief, while Dante Ferraris was generally regarded as the delegate of the large industrials. There were no Socialists nor even *Socialistoidi* in the Cabinet ; yet it was destined to prove absolutely subservient to the more extreme wing of the Socialist and Revolutionary groups.

What was Nitti's programme on assuming office ? To judge by his first speech in the Chamber as Premier, his principles were excellent. He summed up his policy in four points : (1) To bring the peace negotiations to a speedy conclusion, "while safeguarding national aspirations with an unswerving faith" ; (2) to effect the passage from the state of war to that of peace, abolishing all the exceptional measures which the war had rendered necessary, but which the return of peace rendered superfluous and therefore injurious ; (3) to make the conditions of life of the people

less hard, and to carry out a vigorous "policy of prices," without which it was impossible to secure social peace effectively; (4) to prepare the economic and financial measures which the new situation demanded as speedily as possible. For the carrying out of this programme, Nitti added, one condition above all others was indispensable: public order must be maintained at all costs against all attempts at disorder, whencesoever they may proceed. "The maintenance of order is the chief task of the Government. It will maintain it with unhesitating firmness. . . . Production is not possible without internal order."

Let us now see how Nitti carried out his programme. At the very moment when he came into power riots against the high cost of living had broken out in many Italian towns. High prices were chiefly due, as we have seen, to the inflated paper currency and bad finance generally, high freight charges, scarcity of goods, the ever-increasing strikes and the work-shyness of labour, which raised the cost and risks of production; the greed of the shopkeepers and merchants, who took advantage of the general disorder of the home and world markets, to reap a good harvest while they could, and who tended to hoard goods against times of still greater scarcity and still higher prices, also contributed to the increased cost of living, but their conduct was largely the outcome of the former causes, and indeed hoarding actually proved a restraint on future price increments, because it built up reserves of goods which would otherwise have been consumed at once. Yet the public, including many people who should have known better, attributed the whole cause of the troubles to the "insatiable shopkeepers and speculators," and the authorities to some extent countenanced this belief, as it would have been easier to deal with the situation had its causes been so simple. The disorders began at Forlì on June 30th, but they were more serious in Florence on July 3rd, in Turin, Alessandria, Milan, Genoa, Pisa, Bari, etc. Shops and markets were pillaged, much property, including food-stuffs, of which there was such scarcity, destroyed, and the agents of the Camere del Lavoro requisitioned food in the shops

and country estates, which they sometimes paid for, but at rates far below the market price, stored in their own warehouses, and not infrequently resold, except for what was consumed in social gatherings, at several times the prices they had paid. To quote a concrete instance, on an estate near Prato in Tuscany, 100 quintals of wine were requisitioned at 60 lire per quintal by the local Camera del Lavoro ; the wine disappeared and was afterwards sold at 300 lire, with a net profit of 24,000 lire on the transaction. Another form of Socialist profiteering was that of terrorizing the owners of large shops into paying considerable sums in blackmail, as a guarantee that their premises would not be damaged. Facts of this nature, which were fairly frequent, explain the abundance of party funds for organizing subsequent strikes on a large scale, and also, it is said, the astonishing prosperity of certain Socialist and Communist deputies and the costly furs and jewels which their wives exhibited. *Calmieri* (maximum prices) were again imposed in many towns by the mob, or by the local authorities acting under mob pressure, usually at 50 per cent of the previous prices, regardless of the real value of the goods, with the usual result—first the disappearance of the goods, and then their reappearance at a much higher price. In many cases the municipal authorities requested the Prefects to abolish the *calmieri*, which had made food-stuffs disappear. In some places the agitation was spontaneous ; but it was usually promoted, or at least led, by the extremists, often by Anarchists, who conducted the pillage and did not even spare the Socialist co-operative societies. In many factories work ceased, and in some towns tramwaymen and cab drivers took a holiday, while most of the shops closed, *et pour cause*.

The Government, which had, as we have seen, declared the maintenance of order to be its first duty, did absolutely nothing to stop the disturbances ; the authorities were in fact instructed to take no energetic measures, while the orderly citizens, although they certainly constituted the majority of the population, being unorganized, unsupported, and terrified, did not attempt to act on their own initiative.

The enemies of Signor Nitti declared that these riots were actually promoted by the Government, because, as he was unable to reduce the cost of living or even prevent its further rise by legal means, he deemed it advisable, in his ignorance of economic laws, to entrust the task to mob action. It was also said and firmly believed that Nitti contemplated the riots with satisfaction, as he hoped that they would terrify the bourgeoisie into supporting his Government as its only bulwark against real revolution. This view is probably an exaggeration, but there is no doubt that Nitti did encourage, and to some extent justify, the rioting when once it had started.<sup>1</sup> The Prefects were instructed to enforce the *calmieri*, even when imposed by the mob, and to take drastic action against shopkeepers who refused to observe them. Even if this conviction were unfounded, the mere fact that it was widely diffused constitutes a serious charge against Nitti's policy. As Professor Umberto Ricci writes, "It is indeed a grave fact that the instigators of revolt should have confessed: 'We feel that under Orlando we could not have dared to go so far.' And Orlando will certainly not go down to history as a champion of strong methods!"<sup>2</sup>

It was certainly this total absence of energy on the part of the Government which induced the extremist Socialist leaders to believe that the bourgeoisie was really incapable of resisting, and that the time was ripe for a general social revolution. Nitti was soon to find that the Socialist movement, which he was so carefully nurturing and assisting, was to prove a Frankenstein beyond his powers of seduction. Bombacci, Lazzari, Graziadei, and others now determined to organize a revolutionary demonstration on a much more ambitious scale, which they hoped would develop into a real political revolution and result in establishing the "dictatorship of the proletariat" on the Russian model, not only in Italy but throughout Europe. The ostensible pretext was the hostile action of the various

<sup>1</sup> Giulio Pugliese, "Il Bolscevismo in Italia," Florence, Bemporad, 1920, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> "La Politica economica del Ministero Nitti," p. 12.

"bourgeois" Governments against the Bolshevik Governments of Russia and Hungary, and the general policy of the Powers at the Peace Conference, and it was proposed to hold international protest demonstrations against this "iniquitous policy" on July 20th and 21st. Lodovico D'Aragona, secretary of the Italian G.C.L., tried to engineer the movement, but he found that the Labour and Socialist parties in Britain and France (whose Governments still kept forces in Russia), although full of sympathy, refused to agree to a general strike. Propaganda in Italy, however, had been very active, and although the Italian Government had long since withdrawn its contingents from Russia, the labour masses, according to D'Aragona himself, attributed such great Socialist and international value to the proposed manifestation, that they must have their strike, even if they were alone in their "internationalism." The more intelligent leaders realized that the revolution was not really imminent and that the strike would probably prove a failure, but they were afraid of declaring it off after all their rhodomontades, lest they should lose prestige with the masses—a very common state of mind among Socialist and Labour leaders in all countries. The more violent elements tried to organize the criminal classes and professional idlers by promising them unlimited plunder, and at the same time attempted to terrorize the middle classes by threats of massacre and outrage, in which the leaders themselves hardly believed, although their followers did.

The Government began to be somewhat alarmed, and did take some mild precautions, while the recent riots had resulted in a certain amount of organization for resistance among the Constitutional parties and the middle classes, to which a part of the working masses also rallied. The *Associazione dei Combattenti*, a large association of demobilized officers and soldiers, originally created to provide for the economic interests of its members, constituted a first nucleus for such action, as the ex-combatants were naturally opposed to the policy of the Reds, who never failed to revile the Army and to insult all those who had done their duty in the war. But its character to some extent varied

from town to town, and in certain places it had degenerated into a platform for political ambitions, to the extent of even coquetting with Socialism, as occurred in Florence ; purged of its less worthy elements it afterwards played a useful part, but ceased to exercise any great political influence, and finally gave birth to a legally constituted organization for providing land and employment for ex-service men. More important were the various citizen committees, such as the *Alleanza di Difesa cittadina* in Florence, the *Unione antibolscevica* in Rome, etc., created for the purpose of combating revolutionary agitation, protecting life and property, and guaranteeing the right to work, for those who did not wish to strike, against the threats of the strikers. Here and there were the beginnings of organizations for replacing strikers by volunteer workers in the more necessary public services. In Northern Italy were the now famous *Fasci di Combattimento*, more closely knit and better disciplined local organizations of ex-combatants, with definite patriotic objects ; their creator was Benito Mussolini, editor of *Il Popolo d'Italia*, but as yet they were only in embryo. The Nationalist party sympathized with these various movements, and gave them support, while many of its members also belonged to the citizen's associations or the Fasci. The *Arditi* association too should be mentioned composed of men who had served in the assault units, specially selected on account of their exceptional courage and daring ; they were probably the first to put the fear of God into the Communists.

When the fateful 20th of July dawned, a day which by many of the more timid bourgeois was anxiously awaited somewhat in the same spirit as was the beginning of the year 1000 by the superstitious at the end of the X century, work was suspended in most of the factories of North Italy, and the trams did not run in many towns. But the railway-men and postal employees worked as usual, in many North Italian towns there was no strike at all, and the South was practically unaffected. The Government had taken some measures to prevent outbreaks, and the attempts to cut the railway lines which occurred in two or three places were

severely dealt with. In fact no disorders occurred, but this was probably due to the action, or threat of action, of the citizens, which alarmed the Reds, rather than to Government measures which no one believed would be carried very far. The strike ended after forty-eight hours.

Fortunately during the whole of this period the troops and police, in spite of the tireless revolutionary propaganda, often tolerated by the authorities, behaved admirably, and showed no sign of indiscipline or disaffection, except in the case of the Ancona mutiny in June, 1920 (see p. 91), which, however, only lasted a few hours.

The Prime Minister, with the object of liberating the Army from police duties and at the same time of reforming the whole police organization, abolished the old corps of the *Guardie di pubblica Sicurezza*, who appeared sometimes in uniform and sometimes in mufti, and were therefore known by sight to the criminal elements, and proceeded to the creation of the *Guardie Regie*, a corps of military police, to operate mainly in the towns, as the *Carabinieri* did in the country. This force, which was to amount to 100,000 men, including cavalry squadrons and machine-gun units, but never actually reached that figure, did render some services at first ; but the men, often entrusted with delicate police and even semi-judicial functions, were too young and inexperienced, and the officers, many taken from the Army, were not always the very best. The force was also used by Nitti and some of his successors for political purposes, and further, the corps as a whole proved enormously expensive—privates in the mounted units cost as much as officers. Its financial administration eventually gave rise to grave scandals, and, as we shall see, one of Mussolini's first acts was to abolish them. The detective force, also created by Nitti, proved satisfactory.

The failure of the July demonstrations to develop into a revolution was a blow for the extremists, and cast some ridicule on them, but they were by no means demoralized. The strike mania continued in full force, and local disorders broke out frequently on the most trifling pretexts. There were troubles at Trieste on August 3rd, where the Com-

munists coalesced with the remnants of the old Austrophil party and the anti-Italian Slav elements, who openly proclaimed their intention of driving the Italians back to the Tagliamento.<sup>1</sup> But the riots ended in a patriotic demonstration in which the offices of the *Lavoratore*, the local Communist organ, were wrecked. Attacks on the offices of the extremist papers by patriotic citizens tended to become a frequent form of reprisal, because it was the Red press which chiefly helped to keep up the constant state of unrest by its daily or weekly outpourings of vitriol, and its savage attacks against everything which good Italians held sacred—the King, family institutions, property, the victorious war, the liberation of the unredeemed territories, the Army and Navy, the memory of the fallen—indeed, the whole tradition of Italy ancient and modern. The three editions of the *Avanti* (Milan, Turin, and Rome), the *Umanità Nuova* of Turin, the *Ordine Nuovo* of Milan, the *Lavoratore* of Trieste, and scores of other weekly rags were largely responsible for the growth of savage class hatred.

Nitti's explanation of the general state of unrest throughout the country was that it was a form of madness consequent on the war, common to all countries, and that the only remedy was let it work itself out. Theoretically this view had some foundation, but the danger was that if wholly unchecked, the malady might kill the patient before he had time to recover, or at least so weaken him as to make him a chronic invalid. When the patient is a great nation, experiments of this kind are not permissible. Moreover, even if Nitti himself did not actually encourage disorder, he certainly did favour, as we shall see, those forms of State Socialism whereby the more moderate Socialists hoped through a process of infiltration to make themselves masters of the country, and which were such grave hindrances to its economic revival, and therefore indirectly promoted unrest. What he was really aiming at was to govern with the help of the "mass parties," i.e.

<sup>1</sup> See Signor Giunta's statement in the *Popolo d'Italia*, February 11, 1923.

the Socialists and the *Popolari* (Catholic), and in general all the ex-neutralists.

Having failed in his promise to maintain order, let us see how Nitti carried out the rest of his programme. The peace negotiations still led to no result as far as Italy's interests were concerned, and this was at least in part due to the diffidence regarding Italy's internal stability engendered in foreign nations by the unrest with which the Government professed itself unable to cope. The passage from the state of war to that of peace consisted in maintaining, re-establishing, and indeed increasing those very war restrictions which Nitti expressed the intention of abolishing. On July 26th he issued an admirable circular to the Prefects enjoining on them to re-establish internal free trade and suppress all restrictions on the transport of goods from one province to another, which had with doubtful expediency and unsatisfactory results been introduced during the war. Yet on August 15th he set up the consortia of traders for the distribution of State-controlled food-stuffs with a plethoric and complicated bureaucracy of inspectors, committees, commissioners, etc., with unlimited motor-cars at their disposal, and soon after other obligatory consortia for butter, cheese, etc. were created. The consortia of producers of certain goods, concived by Signor Murialdi, the Under Secretary of State for Supplies, were all to the advantage of the existing large producers, who alone were admitted to them and formed a closed caste ; the smaller men were crushed out and new producers refused admittance, which of course was fatal to competition and eventually to production. The scheme further involved the appointment of Government commissioners for distributing food-stuffs and other goods according to orders from above, so that supply came to be an instrument for political influence ; provinces whose deputies were favourable to the Cabinet were always sure of securing larger supplies of food-stuffs than those where opposition elements prevailed. Fresh series of restrictions on the transport of goods from one province to another were enacted, foreign trade was yet more hampered by import and export restrictions, and the

State monopoly of exchanges interfered with every form of business. Nitti's customs policy in fact, in spite of his professions of free trade, was based on the most rigid protection. The import of large classes of goods was absolutely prohibited, save for persons provided with permits, obtained, usually with great difficulty, through an advisory committee on imports and exports. Other goods might be imported without permits, but were burdened with almost prohibitive duties ; agricultural implements, of which there was a crying need, were among those subjected to the heaviest charges. The iron and steel industry, to which the war had given a fictitious impulse, was also strongly protected, as Nitti gave it his particular support.<sup>1</sup> All this was part of the pernicious system of "associated economy" devised by Signor Giuffrida, one of Nitti's most faithful henchmen, who had for some time been in charge of the supply services ; he was a man of a certain versatility of intelligence, but incredibly wrong-headed and unpractical, and his semi-Socialist tendencies had led him to invent this preposterous system of associating the State with a quantity of business enterprises, which threw the whole economic and financial system of the country out of gear and cost Italy enough milliards to pay for another quite respectable little war.

In the domain of agriculture Nitti encouraged the erroneous belief that Italy contained vast tracts of uncultivated land, abandoned by improvident and neglectful landlords, which might be rendered highly productive if only the peasants could obtain possession of them. In a circular to the Prefects of August 23, 1919, Nitti spoke of "2,000,000 hectares of uncultivated land," which simply do not exist. He also talked of splitting up the large estates into small holdings, quite regardless of the necessity for providing the new peasant proprietors with adequate housing accommodation, implements, seed, cattle, etc., without which they could not farm the land even if they obtained it gratis ; he also forgot the great differences existing in the various kinds of land, and that in many

<sup>1</sup> Umberto Ricci, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-24.

places the system of large estates is the only possible one, or at least the most productive. On September 2nd a decree drafted by Signor Visocchi, Minister of Agriculture, authorized the Prefects to distribute land, which they were free to select, to whom they liked. The professed object of the measure was to increase the production of food-stuffs and to procure employment for agricultural labour, especially for ex-combatants ; but the result was that bands of idlers, bogus co-operative societies, and the most incompetent peasants were authorized to occupy and cultivate estates ; naturally they never sought the few really uncultivated or inadequately cultivated areas, but invaded the best farmed lands, usually with no other object than that of seizing and selling the crops, after which, in many cases, they abandoned the land once more and returned to the nearest town or village. The landowners and farmers protested vigorously, and the Government was obliged to issue a new decree limiting the forced occupations to insufficiently cultivated land and admitting appeals to the Ministry of Agriculture against the decrees of the Prefects ; but the evil was done, and the pernicious theory of "the land to the peasants" inculcated. In many parts of Italy, especially in the Lazio, the Tuscan Maremma, and in Sicily, numbers of estates were invaded, with the result that farming was discouraged and production reduced. The Visocchi decrees also encouraged every form of political feud, family quarrels, electoral wrangles, and graft, and the Prefects occasionally availed themselves of their authority in agricultural matters for political purposes, authorizing the occupation of estates belonging to opponents of the Cabinet.

Nitti's financial policy succeeded in raising the revenue by means of huge increases of taxation, including a form of capital levy, but he entirely failed to reduce expenditure, and indeed actually increased it by creating new monopolies, new Government departments, and fresh hosts of officials. Economic enterprises run by the State, both old and new, such as the railways, the postal services, and the various Government monopolies and State-controlled trades, all showed alarming and increasing

deficits. The taxpayers, seeing their money thus squandered, became more and more restive under the increasing burden of taxation, and business men were forced to devote nearly half their activities to devising means for evading it. It is easy to realize why, in these conditions, Nitti's programme of rendering the economic state of the people easier and of reducing the high cost of living failed lamentably.

From a moral point of view perhaps the most unpardonable aspect of Nitti's policy was his attitude towards the Army and the men who had fought in the war. Originally he may have been inspired by a legitimate desire that the nation should put the war spirit behind it and shake itself free from the passions which the war had aroused. But in his anxiety to curry favour with the Socialists, who openly professed anti-patriotism as the basis of their policy, his conduct degenerated into a determination to make the country forget that it was one of the victorious Powers and discard all gratitude towards the men who had risked their lives or the memory of those who had lost them for its sake. While the wages of railwaymen were largely increased, no distinction being made between the good workers and the idlers, distinguished officers of high rank had to be content with miserable pittances. When disorders occurred, and even during the lucid intervals of comparative quiet, gangs of ruffians would attack isolated officers and soldiers in the streets, maltreat them, and in some cases murder them in cold blood ; those who were decorated with medals for valour or wound badges were especially exposed to these assaults, as the Red leaders were determined to vent their spite above all on those who had most distinguished themselves in the war. The Government limited itself to issuing orders that officers when not on duty were to go about in mufti and unarmed. On official occasions officers were systematically slighted by Ministers, and the opinions even of the most eminent generals and admirals on purely technical matters were disregarded. The campaign medal was not distributed lest it should offer an occasion for a display of the "militarist" spirit, and the victory celebrations were put off indefinitely for the same

reason. The process of demobilization was commenced in July by breaking up the Third Army, which occupied a very special place in the affections of the nation, for its splendid record in the war and the discipline and fine esprit de corps which its commander, H.R.H. the Duke of Aosta, had instilled into it. Nitti seems to have felt a peculiar animosity against the Duke, and is credited with having spread about the report of a fantastic plot against the Government engineered by him, General Giardino and D'Annunzio to set up a military dictatorship. He is even said to have subjected the Duke's private correspondence to police surveillance.

The worst measure of all was the decree issued under Socialist pressure and with the private support of the Partito Popolare amnestying all deserters and thereby placing them on the same footing as the men who had served their country with honour (September 2, 1919). The pretext for this measure was, as usual, the necessity for eliminating war passions, but the effect was most deplorable ; all classes felt it as a national humiliation, except of course those who benefited by it, while the parents and widows of the fallen regarded it as an insult to the memory of the dead. General Albricci, a distinguished and gallant soldier who, as Minister of War, countersigned the decree, although he had acted under the instructions of the Premier, acquired great unpopularity by that action, not only in the Army but throughout the country. On the same day the Government issued another decree amnestying a large number of common criminals, who were thus let loose on society at a particularly critical moment, and helped to swell the ranks of the Socialists and Communists.

The previous Cabinet had instituted a commission of inquiry into the causes of the Caporetto disaster, and it was so composed as to ensure the whitewashing of Signor Orlando's internal policy during the period preceding the battle. On July 24th it handed in its report, which proved a most tendentious document ; immediately afterwards the Government published an official summary of it, which aroused a storm of indignation and recrimination throughout

the country. As a printers' strike was then going on in Rome and only the Socialist *Avanti* was published, the public of the capital had nothing but the Socialist view set before it, which happened also to be that of the Government. The report systematically attenuated the effects of Socialist and Clerical propaganda and laid the whole blame on certain generals. In consequence of its findings Generals Cadorna (Chief of the General Staff), Porro (Assistant Chief of the Staff), Capello (G.O.C. Second Army), Cavaciocchi (G.O.C. Fourth Corps) were placed on the retired list, Montuori, Buongiovanni, and Boccacci at the disposal of the Ministry without commands, and Brusati, who had been deprived of the command of the First Army after the Austrian offensive of May, 1916, was reinstated. The effect of the report was to intensify the general feeling of depression and to recall only the most painful aspects of the war, casting a shadow on the admirable achievements of the Army as a whole.

The food situation still remained serious. The cost of living, in spite of, or rather because of, the restrictive Government measures, increased from week to week, and there was an actual scarcity of bread, meat, sugar, and many other goods. Before the war the normal annual consumption of wheat in Italy had been 63,000,000 quintals, or 180 kilograms per inhabitant (in France it was 225 kilograms), of which about 49,000,000 or 50,000,000 were home grown and the rest imported ; in 1919, owing to the increase of population, due to the newly annexed provinces, 67,000,000 were required, while the harvest had only produced 46,000,000. At the same time foreign imports had become very difficult ; Russia and Roumania were no longer available as sources of supply, wheat prices in the United States and the Argentine had increased, and so had freights, and the exchange was growing ever less favourable to Italy. Wheat, which had cost \$1.01 per 60 lbs. in 1913-14 cost \$2.40 in 1919, while the dollar had risen from 5 lire 20 to 13.07, and freights from 3s. per 480lbs. to 17s. with the £ doubled in value. The Government had made the wheat trade a State monopoly during the war, and it had tried

to reduce consumption by mixing wheat flour with that of other cereals and rationing the supply. It requisitioned home grown wheat at a price below the actual cost of production, but as it had to purchase foreign wheat at the market price, it was only able to sell it cheap to the Italian consumer by burdening itself, i.e. the taxpayer, with the difference. The results of this policy were : (1) To discourage the cultivation of wheat in Italy ; (2) to induce the farmers and landowners in many districts to feed their cattle on wheat, as it paid them better to do so rather than to have their wheat requisitioned at a price insufficient to cover the cost of production and have to buy fodder ; (3) to render the importation of more wheat from abroad necessary ; (4) to burden the State with huge deficits, which had to be covered by means of fresh taxation or further issues of paper currency ; (5) to give the people unwholesome bread, which was bad both for their digestions and their tempers. While the war lasted prices and exchanges had risen but little, so that the effects of this policy were not felt to their full intensity, and if the bread was bad and scarce the people were ready to bear the hardship ; but after the Armistice the difference between the cost of wheat to the State and the price at which it was sold became greater and greater, and was largely responsible for the deficit, which eventually reached fourteen milliards of lire.

A word must be said about the new Partito Popolare, or Catholic party, which was destined to play a notable rôle in Italian political life. There was, as we have seen, already a Catholic group in the Chamber, and many municipalities were in the hands of Catholic administrations. The Church and the parish priests provided a ready-made basis for the party organization, and the numerous Catholic banks, co-operative societies, clubs, and other institutions facilitated the work of the party managers. The old group was now absorbed into the wider Partito popolare italiano, whose constitution was officially announced in the *Osservatore romano* (the Vatican organ) on June 20, 1919. It rapidly developed under the leadership of the Sicilian priest Don Luigi Sturzo, its political secretary, who had laid down

the general lines of its tendency in a speech at Milan on November 17, 1918—a fortnight after the Armistice with Austria. The executive committee, with Count Santucci as president, first met on January 18, 1919, and set forth its programme, comprising a series of far-reaching reforms of a Christian Socialist character: it was no longer the negative programme of the Gentiloni era, when Catholic support could be secured by any candidate or party who undertook to abstain from voting laws of an anti-Clerical character. The new party at once took up the land question as its speciality, in order to secure the votes of the peasantry. The Socialists advocated indiscriminate confiscation of the land, which was to be given gratis to the peasants, but they did not specify exactly whether it was to be divided up into small holdings, and, if so, which of the many classes of labourers would secure allotments, or be owned in common by the State or the municipalities. The Popolari at first only demanded the breaking up of the large estates, which were to be divided among the cultivators, with compensation for the landlords. This programme appealed to the peasants more than that of the Socialists. In the field of industry the Popolari advocated collaboration between capital and labour. They also demanded religious education in the schools and State examinations, and strongly opposed divorce. In the domain of foreign affairs they advocated a firm and patriotic policy. There was a great deal that appeared attractive and reasonable in this programme, and it secured the support not only of large masses of the peasantry and small farmers, and of a somewhat smaller number of industrial workers, but also, on account of its opposition to Socialism, of a considerable contingent of the landlords and middle classes. At its first general congress at Bologna on June 14, 1919, the party voted a resolution in favour of going to the polls with its own candidates, whenever possible, and only co-operating with other parties when there was obviously no chance of getting Popolari returned. But even during the first year of its existence an extremist tendency appeared within its ranks, headed by Signor Miglioli, whose views and tactics

differed but little from those of the Socialists, except that the strikes and disorders which the left-wing Popolari provoked were conducted in the name of Christ and Catholicism instead of in that of Lenin or Marx, and the processions organized by the P. P. marched behind the cross instead of the red flag. The party was strongest in the Veneto and Lombardy, but also it was influential in parts of Tuscany, the Lazio, and elsewhere, whereas in the South it carried little weight. The Catholic agrarian agitations were particularly virulent in the provinces of Treviso, Vicenza, Bergamo, Cremona, Florence, etc., and the Migliolini often seized estates with as much enthusiasm as the Reds. Conflicts were frequent between the adherents of the two parties, but sometimes they were suspiciously like quarrels between thieves over the division of the plunder. Don Sturzo himself is undoubtedly an honest man, sincere in his conviction that he is acting in the true interests of his religion and his country, but he is a born political intriguer, who would have been more in his element as the Irish boss of an American party machine. His fault, as we shall see, was that while aspiring to make of the Partito Popolare something better and purer than any other party in Italy, he did not hesitate, in order to promote its interests, to resort to all the old party tricks of the worst type of politician. The weak point of his whole organization was that it embraced too much—from the most old-fashioned Conservatives among the minor Venetian nobility and the Roman aristocrats to the revolutionary agrarian extremists, with religion as their only common bond. Its chief merit was that it included a large number of honest men and not a few who were really competent in various spheres of activity, and that as a rule it made a point of only supporting candidates whose morals were above reproach.

It was under these unfavourable auspices that the election campaign began. On September 29th Signor Nitti had had the new electoral law, based on the system of proportional representation, voted by Parliament. According to its provisions the single-member constituencies were

abolished and the country was divided into large constituencies, each returning eight, ten, or even more members (subsequently the constituencies were still further enlarged). The voter, instead of voting for one candidate, votes for the whole list presented by the party which he favours. He cannot strike out any name of which he disapproves, but he can give an extra vote to any three candidates on his list. The system is particularly advantageous to organized parties, for whom it is easier to make up homogeneous lists and whose members can usually be counted on to vote compactly. But it confers far too great authority to the party machine, of which the candidate, and eventually the member, becomes a mere instrument without any independence ; while the impossibility of striking out names from the list induced many voters not belonging to the organized parties to abstain from voting rather than swallow one or more obnoxious candidates in lists of which they otherwise approved. The system was supposed to make the deputy less of a slave to local interests and more truly a representative of the nation. In practice this advantage proved somewhat, though not wholly, illusory.

Nitti had adopted the new system not so much on account of its real or supposed merits, but because it was demanded by his chief supporters, the Socialists ; they advocated it because they believed that, owing to their compact organization, it would secure them increased success at the polls. The Popolari were of the same way of thinking for similar reasons, but at that time, their strength being an unknown quantity, Nitti did not attach as much importance to their vote as he did to that of the Socialists. Indeed, he neglected no measure to secure the support of the latter in the short period which elapsed between his assumption to office and the general election. I have already mentioned the printers' strike, which appears to have been encouraged, if not actually promoted, by the Government as useful for the electoral campaign. At the Socialist Congress held at Bologna from October 5 to 8, 1919, the party decided to go to the polls with an uncompromising revolutionary programme of a "Maximalist," or Bolshevik, character ;

the Congress declared allegiance to the Third (Moscow) International, demanded the abolition of capital, the socialization of the means of production, and the substitution of the instruments of "bourgeois exploitation," such as the State, the municipalities, and other public bodies, by soviets of soldiers and workmen, soviets of popular economy, etc., on the Russian model. Of course the war was condemned as a "capitalist crime" (Germany alone being innocent), and the party directorate declared: "Our fatherland is Russia, our capital is Moscow." The sickle and hammer were adopted as the party emblem (erroneously suggesting that its members were familiar with the use of either), to which a book was afterwards added to attract the intellectual workers. Turati, however, continued to adhere to the pure Marxian theory, and advocated the slow process of penetration into bourgeois institutions, with the object of transforming them into organs for the welfare of the collectivity, instead of trying to erect a Socialist State by revolutionary means; he was, in fact, looking forward to portfolios for himself and his friends in a bourgeois Cabinet, because he did not believe in the possibility of a revolution in Italy at that time. A small group headed by Bordiga declared for abstention from the polls and for an immediate revolution to be effected by a series of armed risings. The actual number of *lesserati* (registered members of the party) was only 100,000, but the circumstances of the times, the general discontent, the depression of the parties of order, and the vigorous revolutionary propaganda had raised the numbers of sympathizers with Socialism to twenty times that figure, and the General Confederation of Labour invited its members to vote the Socialist ticket. The weak point of the programme was that it could only be realized by means of a real revolution, and if this did not come off the party had nothing else to offer to its adherents, as it refused to co-operate with the bourgeoisie and the constitutional parties; moreover, most of the most rabid Reds were not of the stuff that revolutionists are made of, and had little stomach for risking their lives. Turati's method was certainly the wiser one, as it began by offering

immediate material advantages in the shape of well-paid jobs, large subsidies for the unemployed and the co-operative societies, and profitable influences in every organ of government. Although the Maximalist programme was adopted by a large majority, many who at the elections voted for it, and not a few who were elected on the basis of it, felt more attracted towards the less radical policy of Turati and Treves, as indeed appeared later at the time of the Communist split.

The various Liberal groups were divided up, without programmes and no organization to speak of ; the Government was discredited and unpopular, the mass of the voters who were neither Socialist nor Catholic<sup>1</sup> were exasperated at the intolerable economic situation, the restrictions on trade, and the lack of protection extended to property and the right to work, while even the Socialists, in spite of the favours showered on them by Nitti, thought themselves so strong that they felt no longer any obligation to support the Government. The international situation was still in a hopeless tangle.

The elections were held on November 16, 1919, and passed off without serious incidents, save at Bitonto and Corato. The results were as follows : The "Official" or "Maximalist" Socialists increased their strength from about 50 to 156, the Republicans fell to 8 or 9, the Popolari were 101, and 30 members were returned as representatives of the ex-combatants ; the rest of the Chamber was composed of members belonging to the various Liberal and Democratic groups. The Fascista organizations had presented several candidates, including Benito Mussolini, but none of them were returned ; the *Avanti* in fact described Mussolini as "a corpse to be buried in a ditch." Of the Socialists only 19 were genuine working-men ; 50 were described as "organizers," i.e. paid secretaries of trade unions, Camere del Lavoro, clubs, etc., quite a number were wealthy men, and at least 8 millionaires. Among the new Socialist deputies was one Misiano, who had deserted to the enemy

<sup>1</sup> I use the term "Catholic" to describe the adherents of the Partito Popolare.

during the war, had been condemned to death and afterwards amnestied ; he had been chosen as a candidate for no other purpose than that of outraging the feelings of all patriotic Italians, the man himself being a contemptible degenerate and a nonentity.

At the opening of Parliament on December 1st, the King received an ovation from the majority, but the Socialist deputies, after adorning their buttonholes with red carnations, left the Chamber in a body as he entered it. By way of protest against this insult to the King, popular demonstrations were held outside Montecitorio, and some Socialist deputies were attacked and injured. A protest strike was at once ordered by the party leaders ; work was stopped in some places, the usual rioting occurred, and several officers were attacked by Socialist roughs, but some of them, disregarding the injunction to go about unarmed, had retained their revolvers and put their assailants to flight. The troubles assumed a serious form at Mantua on December 3rd, for many years a Red stronghold ; a mob of Anarchists succeeded in making themselves masters of the town for a few hours, burnt the prison and let loose two hundred common criminals, pillaged a number of shops, and committed several murders. The next day reinforcements arrived and order was restored. The strikes ended in some places on the 2nd, but continued elsewhere until the 4th or 5th.

The Fascio parlamentare, which had, at the sitting of the Chamber of September 29th, in vain opposed the Cabinet's decision to dissolve Parliament at such an inopportune moment, broke up. At one of its last meetings the directorate had voted a proposal to establish a connexion with the National Fasci outside Parliament in order to evolve an election policy in co-operation with them and oppose the Nittian candidates, but subsequently it reversed its decision and decided to dissolve so as not to embitter public feeling still further and contribute to a general internal pacification, which it believed to be possible. Some of the National Fasci also broke up. Senator Tittoni, Minister for Foreign Affairs, now resigned on the ground of

ill-health, and was succeeded by Senator Scialoja, a member of the now defunct Fascio parlamentare (November 26th).

In the new Chamber the 156 Socialists became the most influential group, and they firmly believed that the next elections would return a Red majority, whence a Soviet regime would arise. They at once proceeded to act as though they were already the masters, and the Government, from impotence or complaisance, more or less let them have their own way. For the next year Italy was subjected to a tyranny exercised by the extremist parties such as she had never experienced in the course of her history as a united country.

Nitti's own position was not strengthened by the result of the elections ; the Socialists, to whom he had shown himself almost servile, were so sure of their own triumph that they spurned his advances while taking his gifts. In the Chamber they constituted a turbulent opposition, ever ready to shower insults and howl down all who dared to disagree with them. The Popolari, although opposed to the Socialists, merely tolerated the Cabinet, as they had their own policies to further. Of the various Liberal groups, those of Nationalist sympathies and the members of the ex-Fascio parlamentare were resolutely anti-Nittian, while others were but lukewarm supporters. Nitti's own personal following, on whom alone he could rely, was not large. If his Cabinet remained in power it was because there was no other combination ready to succeed to it, and the Socialists would have made existence impossible for any statesman less subservient to themselves.

The international situation was still dominated by the Fiume question. The Adriatic negotiations dragged on, and innumerable projects for its settlement were only mooted to be rejected or withdrawn. The provocative attitude of the French detachments<sup>1</sup> at Fiume led to violent incidents with the townspeople, and in July some French soldiers were killed in a riot ; this led to the appointment by the Supreme Council of an inter-Allied Commission of Inquiry. The latter's report recommended the dissolution of the National Council, the reduction of the Italian

<sup>1</sup> Many of the men were coloured.

garrison, and the policing of the town by Great Britain or America ; this decision exasperated both the Fiumani and the great majority of the Italian people, who regarded it as endangering the Italian character of the town. The departure of General Grazioli and the Granatieri brigade caused deep consternation. Suddenly, on September 12th, the poet D'Annunzio, at the head of a mixed force of volunteers and regular troops (including some of the Granatieri, who had deserted their cantonments to follow him and save the *italianità* of Fiume), entered the town, and took possession of it, setting up his own government. There is no doubt that D'Annunzio's action did secure the Italian character of Fiume, and was generally approved of by patriotic Italians. But the fact of having tampered with the allegiance of the regular troops, even for a patriotic object, created a dangerous precedent, similar to that of the Curragh episode, while D'Annunzio's action can be compared to the Jameson raid ; above all, it created a very awkward international situation. Nitti was beside himself with rage, and on September 13th he stigmatized D'Annunzio's action in the Chamber in the most unmeasured terms ; he established a blockade around the town and even advocated civil war by appealing to the working-men and peasants of Italy to back him up against D'Annunzio's "militarism." But a large part of public opinion continued to support D'Annunzio, and volunteers from all parts of Italy flocked to his standard, including men like General Ceccherini, one of the bravest soldiers in the Army, and many other officers, the eminent economist Professor Maffeo Pantaleoni, and numbers of young men of the highest character, as well as not a few adventurers. For a time Fiume became the one haven where the patriotic idea was not scoffed at, where the authorities did not cringe to the Socialists, and where the tricolour was respected. The Fiume episode, apart from its international significance, was a sign of the exasperation into which the country had been driven by its internal enemies. As we shall see, the enterprise afterwards degenerated, and many of the new recruits who flocked to the poet's standard were a very

inferior crowd ; but in its beginnings it had a spiritual value which, in the painful circumstances of the time, must not be overlooked.

The election of so large a number of Socialists, including many of the most extreme revolutionaries, caused a recrudescence of strikes and unrest, and also of ordinary crime, especially robbery with violence. The Red leaders became every day more truculent ; they constantly invoked the example of Russia and incited the mob to murder and plunder without scruple ; even in so innocent a trade as the millinery business the employees were told by their union secretaries that it was their duty to cheat and thief ! The older leaders like Treves and Turati, who before the elections had preached a more moderate programme, now swam with the tide, and burnt incense before the altars of Lenin and Trotsky. But the electoral success was not enough for the extremist leaders, who now determined to organize a series of monster strikes, because they realized that the increased strength of the Socialists in the Chamber was not sufficient to force the conversion of the State to Socialism through Parliament, even with the tolerance of Nitti, as there was still a Constitutional majority. The programme was to promote strikes in the public services with the object of disorganizing the economic life of the country, in the hope that starvation would goad the masses to revolution. The most promising material was offered by the railway and postal servants, among whom the revolutionary element, although by no means the majority, was well organized and disciplined and dominated the two syndicates. Before the war the railwaymen had been underpaid, but during and after the war wages had been raised until they had reached in 1919-1920, with bonuses, extras, etc., an average of 6,498 lire per annum ;<sup>1</sup> as these increases had usually been secured by means of the threats of the syndicates, the leaders of the latter, who enjoyed the unhesitating support of the Socialist deputies and the

<sup>1</sup> Giorgio Mortara, "Prospettive economiche," 1923, p. 345. These wages were much higher than those of the industrial workers, and had increased more than the cost of living ; in 1920-1921 the average was 10,946 lire.

hardly veiled sympathy of the Premier, naturally acquired great kudos among the masses. The union secretaries received full wages, were exempt from ordinary duty, and provided with free passes over the whole system to enable them to travel all over the country to promote strikes and revolutionary agitation. At the same time the service had been thoroughly disorganized, all incentives to duty removed, bonuses for economy in coal and for punctuality abolished, so that the economic conditions of the whole staff tended to reach a dead level in each grade ; the salaries of the railway officials had been increased very much less than those of the executive personnel, and even the highest officials enjoyed no authority, all power being vested in the union leaders. Conditions in the postal services were similar.

We have seen how the threatened postal strike early in 1919 was only averted by wide concessions by the State. In January, 1920, the union leaders presented fresh demands ; the Government did not absolutely reject them, but merely asked for more time to consider them. This was regarded as a gross insult, and on the 13th a general postal and telegraph strike was proclaimed. Not all the staff ceased work ; indeed, the majority were against the agitation, and in South Italy it hardly operated at all, but in North and Central Italy, where the Socialists were more numerous and the syndicates more powerful, large numbers deserted their posts. Many employees indeed, especially women, were terrorized into striking by threats of violence, and sometimes not only by threats, while all believed that the strikers were sure of immunity and that those who stuck to their duty would have afterwards had their lives made a hell for them by their rebellious comrades. But in many towns citizen committees came forward and called for volunteers to take the place of the strikers. All classes joined up, the students being particularly useful. In a very short time a makeshift staff was recruited and organized and the more important services set going ; the results would have been even more satisfactory if the volunteers had been adequately supported by the authorities, instead

of being openly discouraged—in Florence and some other towns the Prefects actually prevented volunteer workers from delivering letters, so that the public had to make long queues outside the post offices. Nevertheless, the volunteer movement did break the back of the strike, as it showed the employees that their services were not indispensable, and when the Government undertook to submit their demands to Parliament, they returned to work (January 22nd). But none of the ringleaders were punished, and in many offices the higher officials who had stuck to their duty were brutally insulted by the returning strikers.

Now it was the railwaymen's turn. They too had presented demands to the Government early in January for a general increase of wages which would have involved an extra expenditure of several hundreds of millions. As they were not instantly satisfied a general strike was proclaimed on the 20th. This movement too was not universal—66,000 men out of a total of 193,000 struck. In the railway areas of Milan, Turin, Bologna, and Florence the majority of the men came out, in Central Italy about one-half, while in the south attendance was almost normal. The Government did try to ensure a reduced service, and in fact on every line at least one train a day was run each way all through the strike (1,063 trains ran on the first day and 1,789 on the last). Here again it was the volunteers who enabled the Government to cope with the situation, young men of all ranks coming forward to help ; engineers and ex-naval officers ran trains, while others stoked, cleaned locomotives, inspected tickets, and ex-officers patrolled the lines to prevent sabotage. The volunteer workers on the passenger trains would send the hat round for the benefit of railwaymen who had not struck, and this gave rise to an absurd incident. Turati, the leader of the moderate Socialists, who happened to be travelling one day during the strike, contributed ten lire to the collection ; the fact having become known produced an indignant outcry among his comrades, and the Milan section of the party threatened to expel him. It was only with difficulty

that he was able to clear his character of the shameful accusation. Another Socialist deputy had a more unpleasant experience ; when his travelling companions discovered his identity, they kicked him out of the train at a lonely wayside station, as one of the persons responsible for the criminal agitation.

The unexpected energy on the part of the Government, and above all the action of the volunteers and the large number of defections among the strikers, brought the agitation to an end on January 29th ; the railwaymen had practically surrendered and were about to return to work unconditionally. But Nitti, who had been absent in Paris, returned to Italy, and instead of having the strike leaders severely punished as the law provided, agreed to readmit them to their employment with immunity, and although the strikers were not to receive their wages for the days they had been on strike, he decreed that the amount which had been docked was to be spread over several months' pay and to be paid into a fund for building railwaymen's dwellings. He also undertook to present their demands to Parliament and to extend the eight hours' day to the few categories who did not yet benefit by it. The object of the strike, apart from the economic demands which were a mere pretext, was purely political, and as the railways belonged to the State it could not be regarded as a struggle against capitalism, but was a direct attempt to overthrow the Government ; as such it had failed, but the cowardly policy of the Premier nullified the useful results of this defeat to the community and the State. On February 9th, in answer to a number of questions in the Senate, he expounded the following amazing doctrine : "Some Senators . . . in dealing with the character of the strike, have touched on a delicate subject. They have declared that by the terms of Article 56 (of the Railway Regulations) it is the duty of the Government to dismiss the strikers. When we consider that in some parts of Italy 100 per cent of the locomotive staff had struck, we shall realize that the enforcement of Article 56 would have been disastrous : the railways would have ceased to run. . . . Is there

anyone who will make a more definite proposal concerning the enforcement of Article 56? I consider that that article is fully applicable in normal conditions, but not when a large number of people are involved. In any case, this question must be reconsidered from the point of view of the functions of the State. Some of the State's functions are sovereign; others are of a semi-public nature—in fact, they are performed in many countries by private companies; others, again, are of an entirely private nature. All this matter must be regulated. For instance, obligatory arbitration is desirable when it is possible to apply it, just as Article 56 must be enforced in the case of individuals who quit work." This meant that if a few men deserted their posts without justification they were guilty of a misdemeanour and must be punished, but when several thousands commit such action, disorganizing the whole economic life of the country, they must enjoy full immunity.

A few days before Nitti had set forth this theory the Central Committee of Agitation and the Executive Committee of the Syndicate, in a proclamation to the railwaymen, declared that "it was the first time that the State, the defender of capitalism, had bowed its head before the predominant force of a class hitherto despised. The *Sindacato italiano ferrovieri* has succeeded in breaking the feudal principle of the authority of the State, which denied the right to strike on the part of its employees." The *Avanti* published an article entitled, "The railwaymen return to work with red flags flying." This language appeared mere bombast, but Nitti's above-quoted speech proved it to be truthful. The Premier had abdicated the authority of the State in favour of what had been described in a Stefani *communiqué* on the day the strike began as "an anarchical minority."<sup>1</sup>

The example of the railwaymen and the immunity they enjoyed was a direct encouragement to other classes to do likewise, and all through the winter and spring of 1920 strikes, riots, and outrages of all kinds followed each other

<sup>1</sup> G. Brucolieri, op. cit.

in quick succession. In the case of conflicts between capital and labour the Prefects, instead of acting as impartial mediators, usually threw the weight of their authority on the side of the strikers, however preposterous their demands might be. In agricultural strikes the authorities would often reply to landowners, who asked for protection to gather in the harvest, that they would be held responsible for any disorders which might occur, and that they had better give way at once to the labourers' demands ; in certain districts the landowners were advised by the authorities to abstain from demanding rent of their tenants. Of course the Prefects were merely obeying instructions from Rome, the programme being to grant labour all that it asked for, without entering into the merits of each particular controversy. The workers knew this, and naturally took advantage of it.

In February the employees of the secondary railways of Lombardy went on strike for higher wages, and did not return to work until April. On March 24th a ridiculous dispute over a clock which had been tampered with at the Fiat motor-car works in Turin resulted in a strike of all the metal workers in that city ; it ended on April 23rd, but this time with the defeat of the men. The outcome of the general railway strike of the preceding January led to constant partial strikes on the railways ; the railwaymen refused to run trains which were supposed to be conveying arms or munitions to Poland, then in the death-grip with the Bolshevik invaders, because it was believed that the capitalist Governments were trying to destroy Russian " freedom." Thus on June 8th the Cremona railwaymen struck because the under-stationmaster insisted on despatching a train which was quite erroneously supposed to be carrying such freight, and the railway administration actually dared to refuse the injunction of the strikers to dismiss him for doing his duty ; the movement extended to Milan and other parts of North Italy, and although it was nowhere general it half paralysed the service until June 24th. On other occasions trains were held up because they were conveying soldiers or police to places where strikes or disorders

were going on or expected,<sup>1</sup> or even passengers obnoxious to the leaders of the syndicate. When strikes or other troubles occurred in some particular town the local railwaymen at once proclaimed a sympathy strike, and for two or three days the district would be cut off from railway communication. On one occasion the Genoa railwaymen struck because the Government had instituted a school for instructing soldiers in railway work, on the ground that it was an attempt to train a body of strike-breakers ; the agitation ceased when the authorities explained that they were merely reopening an old school that had been closed during the war. Even when not on strike the railwaymen behaved with intolerable insolence and systematically neglected their duty. Robbery by railwaymen became daily more frequent.

The railwaymen reached the extreme limits of their audacity when they tried to control the transport of food-stuffs, holding up their export abroad and even from a producing to a consuming province, so as to keep prices low in their own districts ; these measures were applied particularly to wine, as the Reds were always keen to get drunk as cheaply as possible. The one excuse for this conduct is that the Government had given the example of this false political economy by its own restrictions on trade.

Signor Nitti, finding that the Socialists were by no means amenable to his cajolery, was now filled with terror for his own personal safety ; his house in Rome was surrounded by an army of police, spics, and troops, and he never moved without a huge escort of Guardie Regie, Carabinieri and detectives. When in April he had to go to San Remo to attend the Conference on Near Eastern affairs, he was so terrified of the railwaymen that he refused to travel by rail ; he had himself conveyed to Anzio by car—he even made General Badoglio, the Chief of the General Staff, who travelled with him, believe that they were going to Civita-

<sup>1</sup> At the trial of the Bologna murderers (see next chapter) the chief of police in that city testified that Carabinieri and police agents had to be disguised as beggars to enable them to travel by rail !

veccchia until the car was well outside Rome lest the secret should out—and thence on a destroyer to San Remo. He returned by the same route, offering a spectacle of cowardice such as no Italian statesman had ever offered before, nor, we are convinced, ever will again.

On May 1st there was of course a general suspension of labour, which extended for the first time to the railways ; on that and the following days there were serious riots at Viareggio, a seaside resort near Pisa, which began with a row over a football match and ended in a regular Anarchist outbreak ; of course the local railwaymen came out, and for three days held up the service between Rome and Genoa. Troops were hurried up at once, but by order of Nitti no strong measures were taken, and the authorities parleyed with the ringleaders of the movement, which only ended when they were promised immunity. Occasionally the leaders of these agitations would be prosecuted, but the Premier often intervened to secure their acquittal, although some magistrates had the courage to apply the law with justice, well knowing that their action meant retarded promotion or being transferred to less desirable residences.

The episode of the Mazzonis cotton mills in Piedmont, which occurred at this time, was peculiarly significant. There had been a protracted wages strike between the owners and the employees, and as the former were unwilling or unable to grant the demands of the latter they closed down the works ; the hands thereupon suddenly seized the mills and proceeded to work them on their own account. The owners applied to the authorities for protection of their property, but the Government issued a decree legitimizing the action of the workmen. The affair attracted less attention than it would otherwise have done, owing to the numerous other important questions then on the *tapis*. But its consequences were very serious, as it convinced the syndicate leaders that with Nitti in power labour was free to go any lengths ; the factory occupations in the following September can be traced directly to the Mazzonis affair.

In the face of an ever-growing opposition Nitti had already resigned once, on March 12th, but as the disastrous

internal situation deterred other statesmen from accepting office he was again entrusted with the task, and reconstructed his Cabinet. His position was, however, seriously shaken, and on a vote of confidence he only obtained a majority of fifty-five (250 to 195). On May 12th he was defeated by 193 to 112, and again resigned. After a protracted crisis, during which Signor Bonomi, the leader of the Reformist Socialists, tried in vain to form a Cabinet, the King sent once more for Nitti, who produced a third Cabinet. But even in this reincarnation it was stillborn and found little support in any quarter. His attitude on foreign affairs had seemed at one time a reasonable one, and he was believed to be really working for peace ; it was for this that the Chamber and the country continued to tolerate him in spite of his internal policy, in the hope that he would somehow or other secure a settlement of Italy's international position. But now that it was becoming clear that even this was a vain hope many of those who had lent him grudging support now abandoned him. The sudden and unjustifiable arrest of all the Dalmatians and Fiumani in Rome, on the pretext of a fantastic plot invented by an imaginative police agent, and of a patriotic demonstration of students on May 24th, in which several of the latter were killed by the Guardie Regie in Via Nazionale, provoked a violent reaction throughout Italy and aroused bitter indignation against Nitti.

Nitti was indeed, as Professor Ricci wrote, absolutely at sea, driven this way and that. "He let himself be driven about right and left so long as he could save the only thing which mattered, and this was not Italy, but the position of Prime Minister for Francesco Saverio Nitti. The man who had never believed in victory because he axiomatically believed Germany to be invincible is not worthy to govern the nation that has achieved victory." A final instance of his pusillanimity was afforded by his bread policy. The sale of bread under cost price was, as we have seen, involving the Budget in a deficit of six milliards, while the financial situation demanded drastic economies. The only means whereby immediate relief might

be secured was the suppression of the subsidy ; on June 4th the Cabinet issued a decree raising the price of bread to lire 1.50 per kilo, but Nitti, terrified at the menaces of the Socialists, who threatened a revolution, withdrew it a few days later. At the same time, without waiting for a vote, he resigned (June 9th), thus terminating with a supreme act of cowardice the most disastrous regime with which Italy has ever been cursed.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE RETURN OF GIOLITTI

**O**N the fall of Nitti there was but one solution left—Giolitti. The resurrection of that astute but discredited statesman is one of the most curious episodes of contemporary Italian history. Giolitti's conduct on the eve of and during the war had apparently brought his career to an end. But the unsatisfactory results of the Peace Conference, the hostility, or at least the unfriendliness, of many of the Allies towards Italy's aspirations, the terrible economic difficulties after the war had caused deep disappointment among all classes. Nitti's disastrous internal policy, the ceaseless orgy of strikes and unrest which he had encouraged, his callous indifference to the men who had won the war, and the amnesty to deserters had alienated from the Government the sympathy and support of nearly all the Constitutional groups, without securing that of the Socialists. It was felt throughout the country that no Cabinet could be worse than that of Nitti, and some Conservatives or moderate Democrats actually advocated a Turati Ministry. But the majority hoped more from Giolitti, who, they believed, would at least know how to handle the Socialists, while the latter expected to become the power behind the throne, as they had been under previous Giolittian administrations; the fact that he had been the chief representative of neutralism in the war secured him the favour of the less extreme Reds and of the non-Socialist neutralists and pro-Germans.

On assuming office he composed his Cabinet as follows : Count Sforza (Foreign Affairs), the Popolare Meda (Finance), Tedesco, afterwards replaced by Facta (Treasury), the Reformist Socialist Bonomi (War), Luigi Rossi (Colonies), the philosopher Benedetto Croce (Education), the reformed

revolutionary Socialist Labriola (Labour), Alessio (Industry), Fera (Justice), Micheli (Agriculture) Admiral Sechi (Marine), and Peano (Public Works). Almost all the groups in the Chamber were thus represented, except the Socialists, and there were only two pure Giolittians—Tedesco (afterwards replaced by Facta) and Peano. It included no men of eminence, except Bonomi and Croce.

Giolitti's return to power at first caused some alarm in Britain and France, where it was feared that it might imply a change in Italy's foreign policy. But he soon hastened to reassure the Allies on that score, and in fact he continued to follow the same line in foreign affairs as his predecessors ; this was one of his merits.

On June 24th the new Premier laid several Bills before the Chamber, including one for the forced conversion into nominative certificates of bearer shares, which could only be retained on payment of a tax of 15 per cent on the interest, so as to avoid the evasion of taxation ; the confiscation of war profits ; sundry increases of taxation ; a Bill instituting an inquiry into war expenditure ; and one for enforcing the cultivation of cereals. These measures were all of an essentially demagogic character, and constituted a continuation of Nitti's disastrous policy ; they also implied on the part of the Cabinet a very deficient knowledge of financial and economic laws. The conversion of bearer shares into nominative certificates was a particularly harmful measure, as it frightened away capital from all forms of investment, the transfer of nominative certificates being in Italy so complicated as to render them practically useless for commercial transactions. Actually this Bill only became law as regards non-Government securities, but that was enough to produce a fall in the value of all stocks, including Government ones, as it was definitely stated that they too would come under the provision. The confiscation of war profits sounded well, but it was merely another piece of claptrap like the capital levy, which caused infinite trouble to all concerned, brought in comparatively little revenue, and permitted the real profiteers to escape lightly. The increase of taxation was

necessary, but it was badly distributed. As the Army could not be demobilized entirely while the Adriatic question was still unsolved, the bread subsidy was still in force and large sums were necessary for the reconstruction of the devastated provinces, the deficit soared up to fourteen milliards.

It was hoped that the fall of Nitti would lead to some improvement in the internal situation. But much of the venom injected by the late Premier into the veins of the country had not yet produced all its effects, while Giolitti's own policy was at least in part responsible for the continuation of the unrest. For some time the Anarchist and Socialist elements at Ancona had been planning a revolutionary outbreak, and in June they began to conduct an active propaganda among the men of the 11th Bersaglieri stationed in that city, a military mutiny being always the chief hope of the revolutionists. There was some discontent among the soldiers, partly because their regiment, of which they were justly proud, was to be disbanded, and partly because the Anarchists had spread about the false report that the troops were to be sent to Albania, an unpopular destination. On the morning of June 26th some Anarchists disguised as Bersaglieri entered the Villarey barracks and induced some of the soldiers to mutiny and disarm their officers. Other officers, however, quickly succeeded in restoring discipline, and when bands of Anarchists and other criminals in the town, who believed that the mutiny in the barracks had been successful, proceeded to pillage the shops and terrorize the inhabitants, the Bersaglieri, including several of the late mutineers who asked to be allowed to take part in the restoration of order, went out into the streets and put down the revolt ; the Camera del Lavoro, which was the Anarchists' headquarters, was taken by assault. Trouble continued in the neighbourhood of the town for a little while longer, and bands of Anarchists stationed on the hills fired on passing trains, killing or wounding several persons. By the 27th order was completely re-established. In all twenty-five persons had been killed ; the mutineers and other persons responsible for

the troubles were imprisoned, and at their trial in March, 1921, got sentences up to a maximum of eight years' penal servitude.

The Socialists in the Chamber exploited the Ancona episode, demanding a complete amnesty for the mutineers and the withdrawal of the Italian troops from Albania. Giolitti, as we have seen, refused the first request, but granted the second. While an eventual withdrawal from Albania was desirable, and had been decided on in principle, its execution, as a result of Socialist imposition and at a moment when there was a rising of some of the Albanian tribes against Italian authority, was singularly inopportune and produced a deplorable impression ; for a long time it affected the whole course of Italian policy in Albania. It was afterwards revealed in a speech by Mussolini in the Senate on November 16, 1923, that Signor Bonomi, then Minister of War in the Giolitti Cabinet, had replied to the General commanding the troops in Albania, who had asked for reinforcements in view of the revolt of the tribesmen, with the following dispatch : "Internal conditions of country [Italy] do not permit sending of troops to Albania. Attempt to do so would provoke general strikes, popular demonstrations, gravely injurious to solidity of Army, which must not be exposed to such hard tests."

Sporadic strikes and disorders still continued through the summer. The employees of the secondary railways were on strike for some weeks, and on July 14th the tramwaymen of several towns, including Rome, started a "sympathy" strike ; when the Rome tramwaymen returned to work they decorated the cars with red flags, but the public, exasperated at this provocation, removed the flags and soundly thrashed several of the tramwaymen. A general protest strike followed on July 21st in consequence of this popular reaction, but it met with little response and resulted in the wrecking of the Rome offices of the *Avanti*. These signs of popular reaction did not at first impress the Socialists, who still believed themselves to be the masters and to have the support of the Government.

A far more serious and widespread movement now broke

out among the metal workers of North Italy. The metallurgical industry had assumed a considerable development during the last twenty years, and the war had given it an exceptionally vigorous impulse. In spite of Italy's lack of coal and scarcity of iron, vast quantities of machinery and war material had been produced ; small arms, motor cars, lorries and motor engines for aeroplanes had even been supplied to the Allies, while all the losses in guns at Caporetto had been made good within a few months. Italian manufacturers had shown high technical qualities and great organizing ability and resourcefulness ; after the war they rapidly transformed their plants with a view to peace production, and new industries were also set up to meet the demand for reconstruction. Naturally many of these men made large profits and some became multimillionaires in a short time, and while the war lasted they had been able to grant considerable increases of wages to their staff. But the enormous cost and actual scarcity of raw materials, especially of coal, largely on account of the decreased output of the British miners and of what amounted to an export duty on coal imposed by the British Government, rendered the continuance of large profits impossible, while signs of a coming industrial slump were not wanting. The workmen nevertheless continued to demand ever-higher wages on the pretext of the increasing cost of living, of which their own wages were one of the chief causes. They professed to ignore the difficulties of the general economic situation and claimed that the industrials could afford unlimited increases. The leaders of the F.I.O.M.,<sup>1</sup> the shop stewards, and the Socialist deputies egged them on to make ever more preposterous demands ; they well knew that production would be rendered impossible, and openly expressed the hope of producing unemployment on a vast scale, as this would lead to that revolution which the railwaymen had failed to bring about in January. The output decreased and deteriorated in quality. The rise of wages was accompanied by an ever-increasing laziness and indiscipline ; it was practically impossible to impose

<sup>1</sup> Federazione italiana operai metallurgici.

disciplinary punishments, even for the most serious offences, without causing protest strikes, acts of sabotage, and violence, against which the authorities offered no protection. In some instances the demands of the workmen were justified, but the authorities made no distinction between just and unjust demands.

Industrial disputes in the mechanical and metallurgical industries had been going on for some weeks without any result ; on August 13th, after a three days' conference between the Industrial Metallurgical Federation of Italy and the F.I.O.M., the former rejected the demands of the latter, on the ground that the present conditions of industry made further concessions impossible. On the 20th the workmen, at the instigation of their leaders, began to adopt obstructive tactics, holding up production and damaging the machinery. This policy was particularly in evidence at the Romeo Works in Milan, where the owners decided to proclaim a lock-out in consequence. Thereupon the Communist deputy Bombacci and other leaders of the F.I.O.M. ordered the workmen in all the other establishments of the city to remain in permanence on the works so as to prevent an extension of the lock-out. The Federation of Mechanical Industries proclaimed a general lock-out throughout Italy on the 31st. The workmen retaliated by seizing a number of metallurgical factories, at first in Lombardy alone, but subsequently in Piedmont and other parts of Italy as well, to the accompaniment of revolutionary songs, waving of red flags, and threats of murder. The movement now extended to the chemical works, textile factories, etc. The Socialists regarded this form of "direct action" as a beginning of practical collectivism and of the long-hoped-for dictatorship of the proletariat. Although at first there were comparatively few acts of violence, the extremists, encouraged by the absolutely passive attitude of the authorities, who afforded no protection to the rights of property, even when valuable machinery was being damaged, and finding that they could not carry on without the owners and managers, tried to force them to take charge of the factories once more, but in the exclusive interests of

the workmen themselves. They even kidnapped some of the owners and engineers and detained them on the factory premises practically as prisoners. "Red Guards" were formed of the dregs of the criminal classes, "revolutionary tribunals" set up, and persons trying to enter the factories or merely passing near them were frequently shot at. Considerable quantities of arms and ammunition were stored in the occupied factories, and the union leaders declared that if any attempt were made to expel the workmen by force they would resist to the last. In all probability a little show of energy would have put them to flight, as it was unlikely that the deserters and degenerates who made up the bulk of these "heroes" would have risked their skins. At Turin, where the movement was more general, the factory councils attempted to sell the goods manufactured during the occupation, but the owners warned the public that they refused to recognize the validity of such transactions, and the sales actually effected were of very limited importance. The workmen also discovered that it was practically impossible for them to run the factories by themselves, as they could obtain no credit to purchase raw materials and did not understand the complicated workings of industrial enterprise; they therefore ended by making their occupation an occasion for idleness and indulgence in drunken orgies; huge turbines were set in motion to make umbrella handles!

On September 6th the General Confederation of Labour, in which the economic tendency prevailed over the political (the G.C.L. had contracted an alliance with the Socialist party, but was not absorbed by it), declared that the action of the metal workers was justified and even commendable, but that the conflict must be placed under its own supervision, with the ultimate object of achieving collectivist management; it did not, however, authorize the extension of the factory occupations to other branches of industry—for the present. On the other hand, the General Confederation of Industry approved the conduct of the Mechanical Federation in resisting the impositions of the workmen. The Socialist party, whose tendencies were more markedly

political and revolutionary than those of the G.C.L., attempted to gain control of the whole movement, which now involved some 400,000 men, in the hope of converting it into a definite revolution and instituting a Soviet Republic.<sup>1</sup> But at the meeting of the General Council of the G.C.L. a resolution in favour of control by the latter was voted by 591,245 to 409,569 and 93,623 abstentions ; this decision tended to keep the movement, at least for the time being, within the limits of an economic agitation, although it was difficult to prevent its spreading at any moment into the political sphere.

Signor Giolitti was in the meanwhile enjoying his holidays at Bardonecchia, varied by an excursion to Aix-les-Bains to meet the French Prime Minister, and seemed to take no interest in what was going on in Piedmont and Lombardy. But as the situation showed no signs of improvement he at last sent instructions to the Prefects of Milan and Turin to open negotiations for a peaceful settlement. The Socialists were becoming every day more turbulent and the extremists predominated in their ranks. In many instances the workmen's leaders and shop stewards availed themselves of their possession of the factories to break open the safes and pocket the contents. At Turin acts of violence were more frequent than elsewhere, and on September 22nd the 'Red Guards' seized a young Nationalist student named Mario Soncini and the prison guard Scimula, who happened to be passing by one of the occupied factories, brought them before a mock tribunal composed of apaches and prostitutes, and then brutally murdered them. The assassins were, however, soon afterwards apprehended, and eventually condemned to imprisonment for life.

The police at last began to act, and occupied the Gilardini works, where the worst criminals were concentrated, and cleared out the undesirable inmates. The Premier, after terminating his holidays in Olympic serenity at Bardonecchia, summoned the delegates of the owners and the men to meet him at Turin ; he there set up a mixed committee

<sup>1</sup> A. Savelli, "Manuale di Storia europea e particolarmente italiana," vol. III, p. 521.

to formulate proposals for introducing some form of syndicalist control over factory management, with which the G.C.L. and the union leaders now declared that they would be satisfied. The National Council of the Industrial Federation expressed its willingness to consider the question of control, but protested against the outrages committed by the extremists and the tolerance shown to the latter by the authorities. On September 19th, the two delegations again met in Rome and arrived at an agreement concerning the demand for an increase of wages, and the owners also agreed to pay for the work actually performed by the men during the occupation of the factories, on condition that the cost of the damages inflicted should be deducted, well knowing that the damages amounted to many times the value of the "work," which consisted chiefly of breaking open safes and emptying wine bottles. The principle of syndicalist control was grudgingly accepted by the employers, who realized what it involved, but were forced to concur by the Prime Minister, who, on his part, undertook to present a Bill to Parliament embodying the idea. The employers at first refused to readmit all the workmen who had taken part in the occupation, and although they ended by giving way, they did so only under protest against this arbitrary imposition on the part of the Government. The Congress of the F.I.O.M. ratified the Rome agreement by 118 votes to 18 on the 22nd, and the local sections also accepted it by a large majority. The Agitation Committee of the F.I.O.M. then ordered the workmen to evacuate the mills on the 27th; work was resumed on October 4th after the premises, which were found in a state of unspeakable filth and disorder, with the plant in many cases seriously damaged, had been tidied up. There was still some further trouble here and there, but gradually more or less normal conditions were restored. For months afterwards stores of arms continued to be found hidden away in cellars and rubbish heaps, both within the factories and elsewhere, proving the criminal intentions of the promoters of the movement.

As an attempted revolution for the setting up of Communism the agitation had failed. But it wrought an

enormous amount of harm to Italian industry and credit, and for this the more moderate leaders, such as Buozzi of the F.I.O.M., were just as responsible as Bombacci and the extremists. Many orders from abroad were cancelled, credits accorded by foreign firms withdrawn, cargoes destined for Genoa diverted to Marseilles or Cete, and many foreign ships avoided Italian ports as though they were plague-stricken. The value of the lira on the Swiss exchanges fell to twenty-five centimes (it had been seventy-four at the beginning of the year), while the fall in the value of Government 5 per cent stock caused a loss of seven milliards.<sup>1</sup> Although the situation of the country as a whole was never quite so bad as foreign observers believed, the dramatic character of these events and the pusillanimity of the Government, contributed more than anything else to engender a general belief that Italy was on the verge of a catastrophe.

The attempt to enforce the principle of syndicalist control by legislation also wrought great injury to Italy's economic situation. Some form of control, or rather participation in factory management, by the workmen might be theoretically justified if it led to a better understanding between capital and labour, and made known to the workmen the real conditions of the various industries and their capacity to bear increased burdens. This was the aspect of the scheme which was presented to the public, and it was stated that one of the causes of industrial unrest was that the workmen ignored the actual state of industry and refused to believe that its conditions made any further rise in wages impossible, and that the only way to open their eyes was to give them a share in the management. But in practice the great majority of the workmen were quite incapable of grasping the principles of business management and cared little for the idea of control ; they only demanded it because they were told by their leaders that its application would result in higher wages and less work. The union leaders and Socialists demanded it because they believed that it would prove the thin end of the wedge for

<sup>1</sup> Savelli, op. cit. p. 523.

introducing collectivism and give them full control of industry. A certain number of sentimental Democrats applauded the scheme because they regarded it as something vaguely but beautifully democratic. All serious economists strongly objected to it because they knew that it would result in an ever-closer control of industry by the Government, i.e. by an army of incompetent and expensive officials. Also there was no security that the labour leaders, when once they were let into the secrets of an industry, would not sell them to rival and foreign firms.

The failure of the Government to protect the rights of property and its inactivity, even in the face of criminal outrages, including murder, were severely criticized by public opinion. In the Upper Chamber Senators Dante Ferraris, Spirito, and others recounted a series of absolutely astounding episodes which had occurred during the occupation of the factories, proving that for the time being the Government had practically ceased to exist. To these strictures Giolitti calmly replied that the agitation had been on so large a scale that it was impossible to stop it by repressive measures, and that any attempt to do so would have produced disastrous consequences, while the ridiculous Arturo Labriola, Minister of Labour, declared that "a new conception of property was being evolved." The only lesson drawn from this experiment was that the masses began to realize the impossibility of carrying on industry without the leadership of the hated capitalists and the despised experts. But the true explanation of Giolitti's attitude is that he had no confidence in the Army or the police, and was afraid that if strong measures were ordered he could not count on their being carried out. He had really lost touch with public opinion since the war, and failed to understand that any energetic act would have rallied the whole nation to his side. Instead, he adopted the policy of letting the agitation work itself out and of holding the balance between the two parties in conflict, i.e. between the forces of law and order and the interests of the nation on one side, and the forces of destruction and criminal anarchy on the other. Such a policy was an

improvement on that of Nitti, who, while professing impartiality, actually threw all the weight of authority on the side of the revolutionists ; but it was extremely dangerous, and, but for the strong basis of common sense and moderation which time and again has saved the Italian people from going over the brink, might have had fatal consequences. Giolitti's own sympathies were somewhat mixed ; if he had no particular affection for the Red extremists, his small bourgeois mentality made him dislike business men and industrials still more, and he was not over-anxious to afford protection to those whom he regarded as profiteers or near-profiteers, while he always believed that if the Socialists got too much out of hand they could always be bought by concessions to the masses and by bribes to the leaders. In this he was perhaps right, but the cost to the country was too heavy in its present financial condition.

In the Romagna agrarian strikes had for many months been almost endemic. The Red organizations were all-powerful, and they aimed at making agricultural production impossible as long as the land was owned by landlords. There was no real labour grievance ; the peasants were better off than in any other part of Italy, many of them owning or renting rich farms, while the *mezzadri* were all well-to-do and often had large sums in the bank, and the day labourers received very high wages. The leaders of the agricultural unions wanted to abolish both the mezzadria system and peasant proprietorship, so as to reduce the whole peasant class to the status of day labourers, who could be more easily organized for revolutionary purposes. The result was that a large part of the crops was lost, over vast extents of rich meadow-land the grass was rotting as the peasants had refused to mow it ; and in the late autumn most of the wheat harvest was lying in the open unthreshed. The Government at last requisitioned the whole wheat crop of the disturbed area so as to save what was left of it. In the meanwhile the Red *leghe* (unions) exercised a veritable tyranny ; any peasant or labourer who refused to obey their orders was boycotted and his life made a veritable hell. The sick could not be taken to the hospital, children

of recalcitrant parents were refused milk, the dead could not be buried. Individual murders were by no means infrequent, some of them perpetrated in circumstances of fiendish cruelty. The landlords had formed themselves into an important Associazione Agraria, but, although a large part of the peasants and mezzadri were willing to support them, the fight was an unequal one as the whole weight of Government authority was on the side of the leghe and the non-union labourers were terrorized. Liberty to work had practically ceased to exist.

In other parts of Italy agrarian troubles also occurred, but they were of a less serious nature than in the Romagna. In Sicily many landed estates were seized, but the conflicts were usually the result of action by the ex-combatants' associations and by organizations of labourers who really wanted land to cultivate, and the movement was often directed less against the landlords than against the middlemen ; settlements were sometimes effected by agreement with the landlords, who were ready to rent part of their estates to these agricultural associations. Forcible seizures of estates took place in the province of Rome and in the Tuscan Maremma, largely on account of the ill-conceived and worse-drafted decrees of the ministers Visocchi and Falcioni, which professed to provide for the cultivation of untilled or badly tilled land. In parts of Tuscany other than the Maremma, where the peasants under the mezzadria system were extremely well off and relations between them and the landlords had for generations been very friendly, both being regarded as partners in the estates, the ferocious propaganda of the Socialists tended to make them bitter enemies. In many districts of Northern and Central Italy it was the Popolari, under the leadership of men like Miglioli and Cocchi, who were conducting an agrarian campaign as violent as that of the Reds. In the Puglie the agrarian troubles were accompanied by more violence than anywhere else (except the Romagna and Emilia), and not a few landlords and farmers were murdered, while their colleagues retaliated by similar acts of violence on the peasantry. The Socialist deputy Di Vagno, who

had instigated the peasants to revolt, was murdered. But on the whole the agrarian conflicts were neither so widespread nor so violent as those in industry, and it often happened that while one district was in constant turmoil others adjoining it were perfectly peaceful. The troubles were usually due to a few individuals—Socialist or Communist agitators, priests, or exceptionally hard landlords. Save in a few areas the peasants and labourers were extremely prosperous, as the rise in prices increased their earnings, while it affected their own expenses far less than those of the inhabitants of the towns.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE BEGINNINGS OF THE NATIONAL REACTION

THE seizure of the factories may be regarded as the highwater mark of the Bolshevik madness in Italy, for although other troubles were yet to occur, some of them of a serious nature, the agitation was beginning to lose popular support, and the forces of law and order, in spite of being handicapped by the Government, proceeded to organize themselves. The failure of the revolutionary elements to produce a real revolution and the serious economic consequences to all of their attempts to do so, together with the signs of a coming industrial crisis, were beginning to open the eyes of the masses, and even of the more responsible and honest Socialists, to the danger of perpetual unrest. The truth about Russia was also gradually spreading, in spite of the propaganda of lies sedulously fostered all over Europe by Bolshevik agents ; the reports and verbal descriptions of Russian conditions by some members of the Italian Socialist party and labour leaders who had visited Russia made the Italian workers ask themselves whether they really desired to see their own country brought to a similar state of dissolution and misery.

But this would not have sufficed if the middle classes and the producers in general had not begun to realize that they were by no means dead, and that if they took a bold line a considerable part of the working masses, who were getting tired of constant strikes and unrest, would follow their lead. These various tendencies were to a certain extent embodied by the Fascista movement. We have described its origins in a previous chapter, but it was now to assume a far wider character and importance. *Fascismo* is closely associated with the name of its founder and

leader, Benito Mussolini. His aim during the war had been to maintain and foster the spirit of resistance against the enemy, whereas since the Armistice he had struggled to revive and strengthen national sentiment by enrolling all who had fought in the war to save the country from its internal enemies. In the dark days of the Nitti-Bolshevik regime his articles in the *Popolo d'Italia* and his speeches had been trumpet-calls to the nation, awakening it to the dangers into which it was drifting. The Socialist leaders, he pointed out, were determined to suppress the national spirit, while exploiting the working classes for their own purposes, camouflaged under such *étiquettes* as "the good of the proletariat." But in order to achieve his programme of national redemption and economic reconstruction it was not sufficient to combat the Red extremists: the political parasites belonging to all parties who battened on the country and were ever ready to truckle to the Socialists in the hope of retaining their own privileges must also be eliminated. Revolutionary agitation would not have been possible without the demagogic tendencies of a part of the politicians and bureaucrats.

In order to carry out this programme Mussolini began to create his *Fasci di Combattimento*—the descendants of the wartime *Fasci*—in Northern Italy. The first of the organizations was born at Milan on March 23, 1919, and comprised some two hundred adherents. It was composed at first almost entirely of young men who had fought in the war; students who had been too young to fight afterwards joined it, and others who were also exasperated by the existing conditions of the country and of the public spirit. "When to-day we speak of the greatness of the country and the freedom of the world," Mussolini said in his speech of March 23, 1919, "there are some who sneer cynically, because it is now the fashion to put the war on its trial; but the war must be accepted or rejected *en bloc*. . . . Not only do we not repent of what we have done, but we go even further, and with that courage which is the fruit of our individualism we say that, if in Italy a state of things similar to that of 1915 were to arise once more, we should again

demand war as we did in 1915."<sup>1</sup> Mussolini and his followers were not disheartened by the result of the elections of November, 1919, but set to work to improve and extend their organization. The number of Fasci increased steadily, as did that of their adherents, and these now comprised others than very young men; distinguished professional men, ex-army officers of high rank, university professors, school teachers, etc., began to join. To the daily *Popolo d'Italia* the review *Ardita* was added, the organ of the Fascista advanced guard, and also some weekly organs. Working-men also became Fascisti, and farmers and peasants, tired of the tyranny of the Red leaders, who reserved many of the advantages wrested from the employers and the Government for themselves and their relatives and intimates; even the masses began to realize that higher wages were of little use if work was being perpetually interrupted by strikes and lock-outs and if prices were steadily rising, largely in consequence of the unrest and the increased wages. But the numbers of the adherents of the Fasci were still too limited to give the movement that national importance which it was afterwards to assume, nor had it yet developed its social policy of reconciling capital and labour. For the present its chief function was to oppose Bolshevism by force.

The first signs of popular reaction had appeared in the resistance to Socialist violence in July, 1919, and at the time of the postal and railway strikes early in 1920. But in the summer and early autumn of the latter year it seemed as though the Reds were triumphant, and even Giolitti, by his promise of establishing syndicalist control over industry, appeared to have capitulated to them. But the municipal elections in the late autumn showed that the Socialists were not as strong as was supposed. Municipal and provincial councils in Italy, although designed to provide for purely local administration, are apt to assume a political character and are closely bound up with the general political situation. Parliamentary and municipal elections react on each other, and the success of one party

<sup>1</sup> Benito Mussolini, "Discorsi politici," Milan, 1921, pp. 61 et seq.

in the former in a district where the opposite party rules in the local bodies often leads to the resignation of municipal councils, and vice versa. The Socialists attached great importance to the administrative elections, and when once they were in power in any commune they made use of their authority to strengthen their political position in the district and prepare for the next political elections. Socialist administrations almost invariably prove extravagant, as that is the best way of currying favour with the masses who pay hardly any part of the taxes ; they provide costly, showy and useless public works, create innumerable well-paid jobs for their adherents, pay out large doles to the unemployed, subsidize the Camere del Lavoro and other Socialist institutions, impose heavy taxes on the rich, but seldom raise all the money necessary to pay for their improvidence. In a large number of cases Socialist mayors and *assessori* (aldermen) have availed themselves of their position for personal ends, and have been guilty of graft and embezzlement of the most shameless kind. The result is the piling up of huge deficits and insolvency. Many of the illegal acts of these bodies are annulled by the Prefects, and then the Socialists cry out against persecution. When things reach a final deadlock the municipality is dissolved by the Government and a Royal Commissioner placed in charge until new elections are held. If a Constitutional administration is elected in the place of the defunct Socialist body, its unpleasant duty is to impose heavy taxation to pay for the damage done by its predecessor and incur the odium which such measures involve. Hardly a single municipality that had been ruled by the Socialists for long was solvent ; it was indeed the professed policy of the Socialists to reduce the local bodies to ruin in order to prove that it was impossible to carry on an administration according to their ideas as long as the capitalist system existed. Extravagance and graft occurred also in municipalities ruled by other parties, but to a much smaller extent, and the great majority of towns and villages ruled by the Constitutionalist parties were honestly, if not always efficiently, administered. Administrations in the hands of the

Partito Popolare, of which there were already a good many, were as a rule better run than those held by the Reds, but they, too, tended to demagogic measures and extravagance.

At the municipal and provincial elections of October and November, 1920, the Constitutional parties (often formed of *blocs* including the Popolari) won notable successes in Rome, Naples, Florence, Venice, Genoa, Turin, etc., many of which towns had returned Socialist deputies and where the Socialists counted on conquering the municipalities as well. At Milan, where a somewhat moderate Socialist administration had been in power since 1914, with Signor Caldara as mayor, the Socialists got in again by a small majority, but the new municipio was of a much more extreme character, and the new mayor, Filippetti, was an avowed Communist. Bologna alone of all the large cities returned an overwhelming Socialist majority, as the anti-Socialist movement was only in its beginnings, and the Reds were still very powerful. Notable Socialist successes were obtained in almost all the other communes of the province of Bologna, and also in those of Ferrara, Rovigo, Mantova, Modena, Parma, Alessandria, etc., in many parts of Lombardy, Piedmont, Tuscany, and the Lazio. In all they "conquered" some 2,000 communes out of over 8,000. The elections for the provincial councils also returned Socialist majorities in Milan, Mantova, Ferrara, Bologna, Florence, etc. The Popolari, where they stood independently of the Constitutional parties, did not do as well as they expected, although they achieved successes in the Veneto and elsewhere. The formal assumption of office by the newly elected municipal councils gave rise to fresh outbreaks of violence; at Milan the Red victory was celebrated by a general strike, and at Bologna by one of the most atrocious crimes committed by the Bolsheviks of Italy, which, however, proved the beginning of the end of their rule in the city and province.

For the origins of the Bologna troubles we must go back a little. The Socialists had been in absolute power in the city and province for some time. The town council was in Socialist hands, and the mayor, Zanardi, had openly

declared that he regarded himself as the mayor not of Bologna, but of the proletariat of Bologna, and he administered exclusively in the interests of the mob, although it was the middle class which was expected to pay. The municipio was a perfect scandal, as all the services were run for the benefit of a minority, the citizens were shamelessly fleeced, and the city's finances reduced to a state of absolute chaos. Bucco, deputy for Mantova and secretary of the Bologna Camera del Lavoro, was the despot of the city, and exercised his authority by means of his bodyguard of armed apaches. When bread and other food-stuffs were rationed non-Socialists were often refused food cards. Officers appearing in uniform were liable to be assaulted and murdered in the public street with absolute impunity for the assassins, no one dared expose a tricolour flag, and to shout "Viva l'Italia!" was more dangerous than jumping out of a fourth-floor window. Every form of crime was freely indulged in as the criminal classes were under the especial protection of Bucco and his gang. No motor-car could circulate without a pass signed by Bucco. The ordinary law had ceased to be respected, and the authorities had instructions never to interfere with the doings of the Reds. We have seen what were the conditions in the agricultural districts of the province, and throughout 1920 they had grown steadily worse. It was then popularly said that, although Italy might hope to acquire Fiume, the province of Bologna was lost! Not only were non-Socialists boycotted, starved, robbed, and occasionally murdered, and their farms burnt down, but huge fines were imposed on landlords, farmers and labourers who dared to disobey the orders of the Red tyrants, and receipts were given them made out on the headed notepaper of the municipal or provincial councils, so safe did the Reds feel. Similar conditions prevailed in the province of Ferrara, where the deputies Matteotti and Marangoni were all-powerful. In both provinces the Fasci were beginning to develop, and they formed the only organizations which dared to resist the Socialists and fight them with their own weapons, while they also created an embryonic electoral

organization in co-operation with the other Constitutional parties. They were not in any way under the Agrarian Association, but they collaborated with it in certain cases in the common struggle to free the area from Socialist domination.

On September 20th the Bologna Socialists had decided to hold a revolutionary demonstration as a counterblast to the official celebration held every year on that day;<sup>1</sup> a patriotic procession of modest proportions had braved the Bolshevik threats and laid a wreath on the monument of Victor Emmanuel, but when it was about to break up it was fired on from a restaurant frequented by the Reds of that quarter. Some of the members of the patriotic group fired back and afterwards wrecked a newspaper kiosk where Red publications were sold. This was the first attempt at reaction in Bologna. On October 14th a Socialist demonstration, promoted by the Anarchist Malatesta, was held to protest against the "White Terror" in Hungary, and ended in the murder of a Royal Guard and a police inspector. These crimes aroused the Nationalists and Fascisti, small groups of whom paraded the streets, and, soon the patriotic demonstration assumed imposing proportions; at last tricolour flags appeared everywhere as if by magic, and the council of the trade unions ordered the cessation of the strike which had begun. The Prefect desired that the funeral of the two murdered men should take place in secret, but the citizens, supported by Signor Poli, the chief of police, demanded a public funeral, which in fact was held, and the cortège was followed by nearly 100,000 people. The Ministry of the Interior gave the widow of the policeman a handsome gift of 200 lire; the chief of police opened a public subscription whereby 140,000 lire were raised in a week.

The authorities at last began to wake up, and seeing the strength of the popular reaction proceeded to show some energy and arrested several Anarchists, but they dared not touch the Socialists centred round the Camera del Lavoro,

<sup>1</sup> The anniversary of the occupation of Rome and the end of the Temporal Power, in 1870.

although the latter were far more dangerous because better organized and more numerous. The chief preoccupation of the authorities, the chief of police alone excepted, was the Fascisti, although at that time they were barely two hundred strong. At the municipal elections the Socialists, as we have seen, were successful, but Bucco was beginning to fear for his own personal safety on account of the Fascisti, and was not confident that his own "Red Guards," by whom he was always surrounded, would stand by him in case of attack. He got so terrified that he actually begged the Royal Guards to protect him; subsequently he was arrested for having arms in his possession, and he tried to buy off his immunity by accusing his Socialist comrades. This was the end of his reign, and he was spirited out of Bologna camouflaged in a Royal Guard's uniform; after his departure a deficit of 250,000 lire was discovered in the accounts of the Camera del Lavoro.

On November 21st the first meeting of the newly elected municipal council was to take place, and it was to be the occasion for a general revolutionary movement throughout the town and province. It was organized by the schoolmaster Martelli, Armando Cocchi, Pini, Venturi, and other Communists, several of them members of the council. The plan was to gain possession of the town and proceed to a general massacre of the bourgeoisie, the Fascisti and other opponents; everything had been carefully thought out, supplies of arms and bombs had been smuggled into the Palazzo d'Accurzio (the town hall) in baskets supposed to contain refreshments, the municipal guards, the firemen, and the *octroi* guards, who had been organized as armed Communist corps, and *leghisti* from the country districts were to make a great display of force and terrorize the population. The authorities and the Fascisti got wind of these preparations, and the Prefect succeeded in inducing the Socialists to come to an agreement regarding the ceremony of the 21st: no red flag was to be exposed on the Garisenda and Asinelli towers<sup>1</sup>, nor on the balcony of the town hall, save that the mayor-elect might appear on it surrounded

<sup>1</sup> The famous leaning towers of Bologna.

by the red flags of the associations, which were to be withdrawn immediately, the minority councillors (Constitutionalists) to be respected, while the Fascisti would not be present at the ceremony within or near the town hall. This agreement restored confidence, and the authorities placed cordons of troops and police round the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele, where the town hall was situated, and round the Fascista head-quarters, isolating the building from the crowd of Socialists within the cordon. But no sooner had the meeting of the town council been opened than a red flag appeared on the Asinelli tower, and although it was removed at once by a police officer the report of this breach of the agreement reached the Fascisti and aroused violent indignation among them ; they tried to enter the piazza, but were held back by the cordons. The mayor-elect, Enrico Gnudi, an ignorant Communist railwayman, then appeared on the balcony and began his speech. The crowd cheered vociferously, when suddenly several shots were fired ; they proceeded from some Socialists in the town hall and were aimed at the Fascisti, who were trying in vain to break through the cordons into the piazza. A panic ensued, and part of the crowd dispersed, while others took refuge in the courtyard of the town hall. From the windows of that building the Socialists, believing that the crowd consisted of Fascisti, continued to fire, and also threw bombs into the piazza and the courtyard, and at the troops and police, who were holding back the Fascisti ; in all ten persons were killed and sixty-six wounded. Within the building the council was sitting, the hall packed with Socialists. At first the proceedings were orderly and the speeches fairly moderate ; but while the spokesman of the Constitutional minority was speaking the shots outside were heard, and the councillors of the Socialist majority, the firemen and the public apostrophized the minority councillors with the most savage insults. The Constitutionalists showed absolute self-control and did not reply, when suddenly from the Socialist benches nineteen shots were fired at their opponents ; Giulio Giordani, a disabled ex-officer, decorated with a gold medal for valour, fell mortally wounded (he

died a few hours later), Cesare Colliva was seriously and a third councilor slightly wounded.

The upheaval of public opinion was now irresistible. The Fascisti organized a protest demonstration, in which large crowds took part, the police proceeded to make wholesale arrests, although several of the leading Communists and assassins, including Martelli and Cocchi, escaped to San Marino and afterwards abroad, and the whole organization of Red tyranny crashed.<sup>1</sup> The town council never met again, as most of the members of the Socialist-Communist majority were in prison or fugitives from justice, and was eventually dissolved. The Fascisti, whose numbers were swelling from hour to hour, attacked and wrecked many Socialist institutions, both in Bologna and the province, and the Red leaders hardly dared appear in public save under strong escorts of those Royal Guards and Carabinieri whose comrades they had helped to murder. A few days later a number of Fascisti from Bologna and elsewhere went to Modena to attend the funeral of a companion who had been recently murdered by the Reds. During the ceremony some Communists fired at them, killing two, and the others retaliated by burning down the Camera del Lavoro and the chambers of the Communist deputy Donati. The Camera del Lavoro in Bologna and other Red institutions in other towns of Emilia were also burned. A Parliamentary Commission was sent to Bologna to inquire into the events of November 21st, and its report proved a terrible indictment of the Reds and of the scandalous inefficiency and graft of the previous Socialist administration. A Royal Commissioner was appointed, and an attempt was made by the authorities to disarm the population of the province, but without success. New elections were adjourned until the end of 1922, so as to let the bitterness of feeling die down. When they took place the National parties were returned by a huge majority.

The Fascista movement grew daily in strength, and

<sup>1</sup> At the trial, which was held in Milan in February and March, 1923, one of the accused, Venturi, got thirteen years, but the rest were acquitted, the chief culprits having escaped abroad.

Socialist power broke down in one district after another. Fighting occurred frequently, as the Reds would not willingly give up their predominance; many isolated Fascisti were ambushed and murdered, while their companions adopted a system of reprisals for these deeds, usually consisting of punitive expeditions of Fascisti armed with bludgeons or revolvers, who would enter the town or village where the crime had been committed, arrest the murderers when they could find them, kill them if they resisted, and if not hand them over to the Carabinieri. If the actual authors of the deed were not discovered, the leading Socialists or Communists of the place would be seized and soundly thrashed, and some times the Camera del Lavoro or other Red institutions burnt down or at all events the records and furniture thrown into the street and set on fire. It was about this time that the Fascisti began to apply a new and original punishment to their adversaries by forcing them to imbibe large doses of castor oil, which, although extremely unpleasant, seldom left any lasting injurious consequences, and merely made the victims appear ridiculous. Union leaders whose signatures were on the receipts for the fines mentioned above were now desperately anxious to recover these compromising documents and ready to refund four or five times the amount extorted, because they knew that the exhibition of them to the Fascisti meant that the signatories would be beaten within an inch of their lives and that criminal proceedings would be instituted against them by the public prosecutor, for the authorities were beginning to be moved to more energetic action. A great many of the more obnoxious Socialist and Communist leaders received notice to quit from the Fascisti, and were obliged to leave the scenes of their former glory, or at least to suspend every form of political activity and propaganda. A considerable number of Red municipal administrations were forced to resign, or deemed it prudent to do so voluntarily. At Ferrara, where the situation had been as bad as at Bologna, several Fascisti were murdered by Communists on December 20th, and the consequent popular reaction resulted in the dissolution of the town council and the

appointment of a Royal Commissioner. In a short time there was no longer a Red administration throughout the provinces of Bologna, Ferrara, Rovigo, or Mantova, where the Reds had erstwhile reigned supreme.

Not only did many Red administrations resign, but, as we have seen, a number of labour unions, especially agricultural ones, went over to Fascismo *en bloc*, burning their red flags and the portraits of Marx and Lenin and adopting the tricolour as their emblem. The Fascisti were regarded in many cases as liberators, and on their arrival in a town hitherto ruled by the Reds they were received with transports of joy, just as the Italian troops had been acclaimed on the departure of the Austrian or Papal troops in 1859, 1860 and 1866. With this wide development of the movement the Fascisti now proceeded to adopt a public-spirited social policy. One of the causes of the break-down of Socialism in the rural districts was its hostility to peasant ownership, as the ideal of every Italian peasant is to own a piece of land, even though he may also work on some larger estate to increase his income. The Fascisti instituted in certain provinces, especially Ferrara and Rovigo, a system of land purchase on easy terms by agreement with the landlords, in order to increase the class of small proprietors, who would prove a bulwark of law and order. They also instituted agricultural employment agencies and bureaux for legal assistance, whose services, unlike those of similar Socialist institutions, were rendered free of charge. Together with their social and political activities the Fasci were also developing and improving their military discipline, although it was not yet by any means as perfect as it afterwards became. The black shirt became their characteristic attire, and an ever-increasing number of them were armed with revolvers, and even rifles or carbines ; this latter fact need cause no surprise, as, in consequence of the war and the immense captures from the enemy after Vittorio Veneto, quantities of civilians were now armed. Each Fascista group, or *squadra*, had its own banner, the inauguration of which often resulted in a brush with the Reds, while many *squadre* took the name of some local war

hero or of a comrade killed in civil strife. What struck all observers was the well-set-up, manly bearing of these youths, their cleanliness and good manners, even though many of them were of humble condition, and the very large percentage of them whose breasts were adorned with medals for military valour or who wore wound badges. Fasci were arising in almost every town of Italy, although they were less numerous in the South, where revolutionary Socialism had never taken such a hold of the masses as to provoke violent reaction. The whole country was divided into Fascista districts, each with its own organization, and all the local organizations were gradually being welded into a homogeneous whole under the leadership of Mussolini.

The ascendancy which the Fascisti and the National parties in general were acquiring over public opinion reacted on the Government, for Giolitti always followed what he thought was the line of least resistance. He even decided to hold the long-delayed victory parade in Rome, which Nitti, ever anxious to make Italy forget that she had been victorious, had always postponed. On November 4th, the second anniversary of the Armistice, representatives of all the regiments in the Army, with their tattered battle flags, gathered together from every garrison in Italy round the monument of Victor Emmanuel, and the celebration was held amid scenes of general enthusiasm. People began to feel that the period of Bolshevik madness was nearing its end. But there was still much leeway to be made up before normal conditions were re-established.

There were now signs that the Socialist party was not as compact as it had been, and that a split in the "united proletarian front" was not impossible. The old Reformist group had broken away before the war and was no longer considered Socialist at all. But even in the "Official" or "Maximalist" Socialist party divergent tendencies were now visible. At the Bologna Congress it had adopted the Maximalist or Bolshevik creed, but there were dissentient voices. There was an extremist Communist wing led by Bombacci, Bordiga, Gennari, and other obsequious lackeys of the Moscow Government, who continued to advocate an

immediate revolution and the "dictatorship of the proletariat." Another larger group, led by the veteran Socialists Turati and Treves, were opposed to revolution, although they upheld extreme Socialism and even Communism, and did not dare to reject the aspirations of the revolutionaries too openly. Other groups took up positions somewhere between the two. The more moderate section held a congress of its own at Reggio Emilia in the autumn, where a somewhat watered Socialist creed was expounded. The chief problem before the party as a whole was its attitude towards the Third (Moscow) International. The Moscow leaders feared that their power in Russia would eventually collapse unless they succeeded in bringing about a world-revolution, and now that Bolshevism had been crushed in Hungary they counted largely on Italy; wholly ignorant of Italian conditions and psychology, they believed that the innumerable strikes and riots were harbingers of a real revolution, and that there were no adequate forces of healthy reaction in the country. The Italian Socialist leaders, who hoped to establish Russian conditions in Italy, exalted Russian methods, and even when some of them had visited Russia and realized the appalling state of that country they dared not tell the truth to the people, which was in such absolute contradiction with what they had been preaching for two years. Only a few, such as Nofri, Ponzani and Colombino, had the courage to speak out. But the Russian leaders demanded absolute submission by the Italian Socialists to the Moscow creed embodied in the twenty-one points, and ordered the party to expel all members even remotely suspected of the Reformist heresy—including Treves and Turati. A general congress of the party was therefore summoned and met at Leghorn from January 13 to 22, 1921.

From its very beginning the congress showed the state of confusion into which the party had fallen. Scenes followed scenes and the most violent insults were bandied about; comic relief was supplied by a Fascista wag, who telegraphed to the chairman offering the services of four Fascisti as quite sufficient to keep order among several

hundred Socialist delegates. The Bombacci group was ready to swallow the twenty-one points whole, the group led by Serrati, editor of the *Avanti*, accepted Russian Communism, but wanted it to be bowdlerized to suit the Italian palate, while the Turatiani opposed revolution, hoping to inject Socialism into the body politic by "peaceful penetration." The disorder grew worse and worse: the extremists shrieked like maniacs; Bombacci, the most ridiculous and cowardly of revolutionists, flourished a revolver which he did not fire; and Kabatcheff, a Bulgarian Jew who represented the Russian Bolsheviks, solemnly pronounced the *excommunicatio major* against the moderates and their expulsion from the bosom of Mother Communism. But when it came to votes, the Florence<sup>1</sup> resolution, representing a middle tendency hostile to Moscow and vaguely in favour of a revolution at a distant date, obtained 98,028 votes; it was supported by Treves, Turati, Buozzi (of the F.I.O.M.), D'Aragona, and Baldesi, representing the G.C.L., and by the group calling itself *unitario*, which was prepared to collaborate with a bourgeois Government—hence the collaborationist movement, of which more anon. The Imola resolution (Communist) supported by Bombacci, Bordiga, Misiano (the deserter), and Count Graziadei (a fair specimen of the disgruntled aristocrat turned *sans-culotte*), got 58,783 votes, and the Reggio Emilia resolution, whose supporters called themselves Centristi (they were really the Right wing, but the word "Right" is regarded as obscene in polite Socialist circles and never mentioned except as an insulting epithet applicable to adversaries), 14,695. The split was now an accomplished fact, and the Communists moved into another building to hold an Adullamite congress of their own; eighteen deputies belonged to this group. Moscow definitely condemned the Italian Socialist party, declaring that the Communists alone were the guardians of the True Faith. This uncompromising attitude aroused much irritation among the bulk of the Italian masses, including some of those who adhered to Socialism, for they had

<sup>1</sup> The various resolutions took their names from the towns where they had been voted in a congress.

no wish to be brow-beaten by a foreign Government. Both sections now proceeded to canvass vigorously for the support of the G.C.L., which, as we have seen, was allied to the party but not absorbed by it, and its adherents were far more numerous than the registered members of the Socialist organizations.

The Socialist party, which now styled itself "unitario" instead of "official," also tentatively approached the Government and various statesmen of leftward tendencies, with a view to eventual collaboration with a bourgeois Cabinet, but for the moment no definite result came from these *démarches*.

Giolitti's parliamentary position was not very solid. Most of the Constitutional groups gave him a grudging support and accepted his rule as a *pis aller*, but they were displeased with his lukewarm defence of law and order in the face of the revolutionary outbreaks which still continued, albeit with less vigour and frequency than before. Nitti, who aspired to return to power in spite of his terror at the possibility of attacks on his person by Fascisti, was now definitely in opposition. The Nationalists and Fascisti were also opposed to Giolitti, although they hated Nitti still more; most of the Right were of the same way of thinking. The Popolari were, as always, an uncertain quantity and could not be relied upon; they had lent the Cabinet a conditional support, but were drifting away from it more and more. The Socialists were of course in opposition, but Turati and his followers tended to support Giolitti, a fact which alienated a part of his Constitutional supporters.

The chief practical problem before the Government was that of the bread subsidy. The State still exercised a monopoly of the wheat trade, and the cost of selling bread below the market price saddled the national finances with an intolerable burden. It had now no *raison d'être*—if it had ever had one—as the working classes were earning such high wages that they could well afford to pay for bread at its real value. The Socialists and Communists, in order to achieve cheap popularity, declared that they would oppose any increase in the price *unguiibus et rostris*, and threatened

a revolution if any measure of the kind were carried through. As long as Nitti was in power their opposition was successful and had made financial reconstruction impossible—this was one of the measures most severely criticized by the Brussels Financial Conference—and financial disorder was a most valuable asset for promoting revolution. The situation at the end of 1920 was as follows : The wheat harvest, which in 1913 had been as high as 58,452,000 quintals, had decreased during the war, owing to scarcity of labour and improvident agrarian legislation ; in 1919 it fell to little more than 46,000,000, while 1920 was a still worse year, yielding only 38,000,000. We have seen that the annual consumption amounted to 180 kilograms per inhabitant ; this necessitated the purchase of another 24,000,000 abroad at 210 lire. Thus one kilogram of bread cost the State lira 1·80, which was being sold at only 90 c., with a loss of several milliards per annum. In December the Prime Minister presented a Bill to raise the price of bread, and the Socialists and Communists, being unable to outvote the measure in the Chamber, tried to delay its passage by obstructionist tactics. Finally, after endless and futile discussion, it was voted by a large majority on March 1st. Home-grown wheat was thenceforth to be sold at cost price and foreign wheat at lira 1·50 ; this still left a deficit of 1,440,000,000, which was to be covered by certain other taxes.

But if Giolitti had faced and defeated the Socialists over the bread subsidy—this is the chief merit of his last tenure of office—he still stuck to his fantastic scheme for syndicalist control of industry, one of the worst pieces of class legislation ever conceived. He presented a Bill to that effect at the end of February ; it provided for the appointment of a commission of six workmen and three experts, elected by the workmen of each industry, to inquire into the conditions, organization, capital, profits, etc., of a commission of nine manufacturers' delegates to conduct negotiations with the workmen's commission, and arrangements for the employment of labour. One of its worst features was the fact that the members of the workmen's commission were not elected in each factory to deal with

the affairs and conditions of that particular establishment, in the prosperity of which they might be presumed have to a certain direct interest, but by all the workmen of all the factories in that branch of industry, which meant that the trade union organizers, usually not workmen at all, would be elected ; further, the immense majority of workmen are not capable of appreciating the delicate machinery of buying and selling, credit, etc. The Bill encountered great opposition. Not only were the manufacturers hostile to it, but all the economists and experts, who saw that it was merely a political manœuvre of the Government to secure the support of the less extreme Socialists. Although it underwent several amendments in committee and before special commissions, it still remained a thoroughly bad measure. The debate was adjourned, and finally, after Giolitti's fall, the Bill was definitely buried.

In spite of the still very serious financial situation, which the suppression of the bread subsidy had only attenuated, Giolitti would not make any real attempt at economy. He tentatively tried to reform the bureaucracy, but was too much afraid of losing popularity to dismiss incapable officials or abolish useless offices. He attempted instead to solve the financial problem by raising taxation to intolerable heights, intensifying the demagogic financial measures of his predecessor. Death duties were increased enormously, war profits were to be confiscated to the last lira, the productive and intellectual classes were taxed to the extreme limits of their capacity and even beyond it, so that many forms of property ceased to provide any net income at all, while the already high import duties were further increased. But the large earnings of the working classes remained untaxed. The cost of the Government services continued to increase, and the State railways, posts, telegraphs and telephones, State-owned steamship lines, etc., piled up huge deficits ; the inefficiency of these services, although not quite so intolerable as it had been under Nitti, was still very serious, and the productive elements of the population were still handicapped in all their activities.

Now that the split between the Socialists and the Com-

munists had become definite, the Communists, unable to organize widespread labour movements without the support of the Socialists and the great trade unions, determined to assert themselves and try their strength in the country by means of terrorist outrages, thus hoping to draw the masses into that revolution which the Socialist party, even with the help of Nitti, had failed to bring about by means of general strikes. The first attempt was made in Florence, where a regular revolutionary plot was hatched ; on February 27th a group of Communists hidden in a side street, off the Via Tornabuoni, threw a bomb at a cortège of schoolboys on their way to a patriotic celebration, killing and wounding several people. The Fascisti retaliated by attacking and wrecking the offices of various Red organizations, and killed a certain Lavagnini, a notorious railway agitator and editor of a Communist paper ; he was known to have been the instigator of various similar outbreaks, and had been warned that if another Communist crime were committed in Florence he would pay for it with his life. The railway-men of the Florence district of course went out on strike, and so did the electricians. A series of affrays took place between Fascisti and Communists, and the latter erected barricades in the popular San Frediano quarter. They also committed a number of exceptionally brutal murders, including that of a small boy named Berta, whose only crime was that he was the son of a manufacturer ; he was thrown into the Arno as he was crossing a bridge on his bicycle. The Fascisti continued their work of repression, burning down the Camera del Lavoro and the head-quarters of the F.I.O.M. Other encounters took place in the environs of the city, notably at Bandino and Scandicci. The troops and police acted with commendable energy, and on one occasion had to resort to artillery to demolish a barricade ; they were vigorously backed up by the Fascisti and by the majority of the population, who were enraged at the conduct of the Communists. In all twenty persons were killed and about one hundred wounded. Other outbreaks took place at Pisa, Siena, Cascina, etc., while at Empoli a band of armed Communists lay in wait for two lorries

conveying some unarmed seamen on their way to Florence to replace the striking railwaymen and electricians, seized some of them, and murdered them in circumstances of the most atrocious cruelty. The local Fascisti and others from Florence, on hearing of this outrage, concentrated at the place where it had occurred and murdered several local Communists strongly suspected of complicity and burnt their houses. The popular reaction was now unmistakable ; soldiers and Fascisti returning from punitive expeditions were cheered enthusiastically and covered with flowers, while arrested Communists had to be strongly escorted to prevent them from being lynched by the crowd.

The Socialists, who had done everything to encourage violence and crime, now sought to cast off all responsibility for the results of their own teaching, and the Socialist deputies, who during the disorders had kept out of harm's way, now shed tears over the loss of life, but did nothing to promote pacification. The one exception was Umberto Bianchi, who co-operated with Rosadi, Philipson, and other Constitutional deputies in trying to bring about better feeling between the opposing factions.

A similar outbreak occurred in the Puglie, especially in the province of Bari, but it was easily repressed by the authorities and the Fascisti. At Milan a dastardly outrage was committed by the Communists on the evening of March 23rd at the Diana Theatre, where an infernal machine exploded, causing the death of twenty persons and the wounding of 200, including women and children. The murderers were all apprehended and got life sentences, save one who escaped abroad. Other bomb outrages were committed in trains, restaurants, etc., in various parts of Italy, most of them, however, without fatal results ; the authors of these attempts claimed that their actions were protests against the detention of the Anarchists Malatesta and Borghi, who had been arrested for their complicity in the Bologna outrages and were awaiting trial.

The Prime Minister, realizing that the majority of public opinion was veering round in favour of the Fascisti, who had become a really formidable force which had to

be reckoned with, adopted a more favourable attitude towards them, in the hope of breaking down Socialist and Communist influence definitely without appearing to take sides. Just as he had allowed the forces of revolution a free hand in the autumn of 1920, when he believed them to be the strongest, so now he refused to interfere with the repressive actions of the Fascisti, illegal though they were.

In the field of foreign politics the most important act of the Giolitti Cabinet was the conclusion of the Rapallo Treaty with Yugoslavia. Giolitti was determined to bring the Adriatic question, which had been dragging on for two years, to a rapid conclusion. The attitude of the British and French Governments was now much more friendly to Italy, while the defeat of President Wilson and the Democrats at the American elections deprived the Yugoslav extremists of their chief support. The Belgrade Government informed Giolitti through British channels that it was willing to resume the negotiations that had been interrupted at Pallanza by the fall of Nitti. A conference between the Italian and Yugoslav plenipotentiaries was held at Rapallo on November 8th, Italy being represented by Count Sforza, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Signor Bonomi, Minister of War, assisted by General Badoglio and Admiral Acton; subsequently Signor Giolitti arrived for the concluding debates. The negotiations were rapidly conducted, and on the 12th the treaty was signed. Italy waived her rights based on the Treaty of London over Dalmatia, except for the city of Zara, with a very small district around it, while Yugoslavia renounced all her claims to Trieste, Istria, Gorizia, certain adjoining districts of Carniola and Carinthia, and the islands of Cherso, Lussin, Lagosta and Pelagosa. Both contracting parties agreed to recognize the full independence of the State of Fiume consisting of the ancient *Corpus Separatum*. Italy renounced her rights to all the islands, except those mentioned above, and to certain districts on the eastern frontier attributed to her by the Treaty of London, while Yugoslavia granted privileges to the Italian-speaking inhabitants of the territories attributed to her. Italy thus gave up many of the advan-

tages secured to her by the Treaty of London, and obtained in exchange only the recognition of the Italian character of Fiume. Public opinion on the whole was relieved that a settlement of some sort had been arrived at, but it was felt in many quarters that a more satisfactory solution might have been achieved as, in the existing circumstances, the Yugoslavs were ready to accept terms more favourable to Italy. The Zara arrangement was regarded as inadequate, as the town was deprived of almost all the territory whence it drew its means of subsistence, but the case of Fiume appeared even worse when the secret clause in the agreement became known whereby Porto Barros, which forms an integral part of the town and port of Fiume, was promised to Yugoslavia. This clause had been negotiated between Count Sforza and the Yugoslav delegation, to whom it had been communicated in a confidential letter, and was kept secret even from the Italian officials entrusted with the drafting of the map indicating the frontiers of Fiume. Count Sforza denied the existence of this letter both to the Press and to the Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs, so that when it did become known it produced a very bad impression, and certainly failed to add to Sforza's reputation for veracity and honesty, as well as for statesmanship. The Rapallo Treaty was ratified by the Prince Regent of Yugoslavia on November 22nd, by the Italian Chamber on the 27th, and by the Senate on December 17th.

There still remained the question of D'Annunzio. The poet refused to recognize the validity of the treaty because he disapproved of the cession of Dalmatia and of the frontiers assigned to Fiume (even independently of the Porto Barros arrangement), and as the latter had not been a party to the agreement he considered himself free to disregard it. His *legionari* occupied Castua, Veglia, and Arbe, and tried unsuccessfully to invade Dalmatia, but the Government was determined to enforce the treaty, and after fruitless negotiations with D'Annunzio it established a blockade round Fiume. It must be borne in mind that D'Annunzio's action at Fiume was still approved by a section of Italian public opinion, which considered that the

Government had betrayed the country's interests and rights by concluding the Rapallo Treaty, although the majority realized that this convention must now be carried out. On November 28th General Caviglia, commander of the blockading troops, ordered the legionari to evacuate Arbe and Veglia, to which the Reggenza of Fiume replied by a "declaration of war" against Italy on December 2nd. D'Annunzio again tried to tamper with the loyalty of the blockading troops and seamen, and succeeded in the case of the crews of two destroyers and two torpedo boats. On the night of December 24th to 25th (that date had been selected as no newspapers were printed on Christmas and the following day) operations against Fiume were commenced. For three days there was fighting, although not of a very serious nature, and D'Annunzio himself was slightly wounded. Negotiations were opened at Abbazia with the representatives of the Fiume Municipal Council, to whom the poet had handed over his powers, and on December 31st General Caviglia's conditions were accepted. Order was maintained in the town by Italian troops until final arrangements were concluded, and on January 18, 1921, D'Annunzio finally left Fiume. His conduct throughout the latter phase of the Fiume adventure had been such as to suggest an unbalanced mind, and his insults to the hero of Vittorio Veneto, General Caviglia, and to the whole Italian Army and people, alienated many of his sympathizers. Those in fact who were with him at the last were by no means the best of his followers. The end of the Fiume affair was received with a feeling of relief by all except a few irreconcilables, and although the town was to undergo further vicissitudes, it ceased to have an important bearing on Italian internal politics.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE NEW CHAMBER

A MOVEMENT in favour of a dissolution had been gathering strength during the early months of 1921. The Chamber elected in 1919, at a moment of deep national depression and disillusion, no longer represented public opinion, which had since then undergone a marked change. At the same time the fact that the Socialists and Popolari constituted half the Chamber and that the various Liberal groups were not united made the conduct of Parliamentary business more and more difficult and the formation of a stable Government almost impossible. Signor Giolitti, who had always been a past-master in the art of handling Parliament, found even his skill inadequate to cope with the situation, especially on account of the presence of the large Popolare group on whom he was dependent, but on whom he could not count. Being also deeply versed in the art of conducting elections, he began to drop hints of a possible dissolution ; this aroused the ire of the Socialists and Communists who were afraid, in the present state of public feeling, of losing seats ; Turati, while deprecating the idea of a general election, practically offered his services to Giolitti. Most of the Liberals desired an election, except that section of them represented by the *Corriere della Sera*, i.e. the North Italian middle class, which believed that, although even at present the Socialists would lose a few seats, if the dissolution were postponed for another six or eight months they would suffer an utter débâcle.

There was a proper constitutional reason for an appeal to the country. The new provinces attributed to Italy by the Treaties of St. Germain and Rapallo had now been definitely annexed, but were still unrepresented in Parliament ; it was therefore necessary to provide for their

representation as soon as possible, but it was not worth while to hold local elections there, if a general election was to take place within a few months. The Chamber rose for the Easter holidays without knowing what its fate would be. On April 1st Signor Meda, the Treasury Minister, resigned for reasons of health and his place was taken by Signor Bonomi, while the Popolare Rodino' succeeded Bonomi at the War Ministry. Six days later the Prime Minister issued a decree dissolving the Chamber and providing for a general election on May 15th.

The electoral campaign was pushed with vigour by all parties. The Government favoured the formation of national *blocchi*, comprising all parties and groups opposed to revolutionary Socialism, and these arose throughout the greater part of the country, in many places not without difficulty. Each group supplied a number of candidates proportionate to its estimated strength in each constituency, and thus a list was made up of as many candidates as there were to be members. Giolitti placed certain names of persons obnoxious to him on the "black list," insisting on their exclusion from the blocchi, and the vigorous Fascisti and Nationalists alone refused to obey his orders without discussion. The Popolari usually did not join the blocchi, but presented lists of their own; in many constituencies, however, their lists were "open" or incomplete, which allowed Catholics to vote for some of the candidates included in other lists; and in certain districts they actually joined the blocchi. While the blocchi and the Popolari held innumerable meetings and conducted an active propaganda, the Socialists and Communists, who now were independent parties, in most constituencies abstained from holding public gatherings and carried on their election campaign almost in private. At first they affected to fear that the Fascisti would prevent them from voting at all, and a certain section of both groups favoured abstention from the polls to hide what they believed would be a serious set-back for themselves. But the pressure of ambition proved too strong for the would-be abstainers, and on May 5th the Socialist party directorate decided to take part

in the elections. The Communists took a similar decision, and in the campaign they attacked the Socialists as traitors.

The elections went off without serious incidents, save for a few encounters between the Fascisti and the Reds on the days immediately preceding or following the polls, but in no case were electors prevented from voting by violence or fear of it, and the percentage of voters at the polls was higher than at previous elections, in some cases reaching 70 or 80 per cent of the total. The results were as follows : The new Chamber comprised 535 members, as compared with 508 in the old, owing to the 27 seats assigned to the annexed provinces. Of this total the various Liberal groups obtained 275 seats (239 in the previous Chamber), the Popolari rose from 101 to 107, the Socialists fell from 156 to 122 for the Unitari and 16 for the Communists, the Republicans fell from 13 to 7 ; there were in addition four Germans from the Alto Adige and five Slavs from the Venezia Giulia. The actual proportions of the various parties were thus not very different from those of the previous Parliament, save that the Socialists, Communists, and Republicans were undoubtedly weaker and the Liberals and Popolari somewhat stronger. But the spirit of the Chamber was certainly different ; if the Socialists had suffered a less severe reverse than was expected, the dominant note of the election was the success of the Fascisti and the Nationalists. The former were thirty-five and the latter ten, while a number of other members not inscribed in either group might be classed among their sympathizers ; it was evident that they would not allow the Government to truckle to the more preposterous demands of the extremists and that they would themselves fight vigorously against them. Among the other Constitutional groups the Giolitti Cabinet had many opponents, and if the followers of Nitti, now hostile to Giolitti, had not increased their strength, the Liberal opposition was more numerous. The Popolari showed a tendency to reinforce their Centre at the expense of their extreme Right or Clerical group and their extreme Left which differed little from the Socialists. Among the Socialists the more moderate tendency seemed to prevail,

and the followers of Turati, Treves, Baldesi, etc., inclined towards collaboration with bourgeois cabinets, although such a coalition was not yet an immediate prospect. The Communists, who as a new party expected to achieve a striking success at the polls, actually lost two of the seats held by the members of the Socialist party in the previous Chamber who had adopted Communism. In certain constituencies, notably Florence, Bologna, and Turin, where the two Red parties had been hitherto predominant, they lost a number of seats, and but for a few isolated successes in the South, their total losses would have been even more remarkable. Among the most prominent candidates who failed to be re-elected were the ex-Ministers Sacchi, Chimienti, and Ruini ; the ex-Under-Secretaries Alfredo Baccelli, Bignami, and Tortorici ; the poet Scm Benelli, one of the first combatant deputies ; Cavalli the Popolare leader ; Caroti the most violent Communist of the Florence district. The eminent economist Marquis De Viti de Marco, the ex-Under-Secretary for Propaganda Gallenga, and the distinguished corps commander General Di Giorgio did not stand, while the notorious Giulietti, semi-Bolshevik, semi-D'Annunzian organizer of the seamen's strikes, and Professor Salvemini, the chief exponent of the *rinunziataria* policy failed to obtain even nominations. The new provinces returned five Italian Popolari and one Socialist for the Trentino, four Germans for the Alto Adige, three Italian Liberals and one Communist for Trieste, five Italians and one Slav for Istria, four Slavs and one Communist for Gradisca-Gorizia.

In the reparations controversy the Italian Cabinet adopted as far as possible a conciliatory attitude, trying to bring about an agreement between Britain, France, and Germany ; the uncompromising attitude of the Germans of the Alto Adige, encouraged by the Germans from the Reich, alienated a good deal of the sympathy which Germany had found in Italy as a result of the manner in which Italian questions had been dealt with by the Allies at the Peace Conference. Count Sforza's position as Minister for Foreign Affairs was somewhat shaken ; the Rapallo Treaty

and its consequences had not added to his reputation, the fact that he had allowed the Russian "commercial" mission to remain in Rome when there was no longer a legitimate motive for its presence, his attitude over the incident with Poland in consequence of the murder of Italian soldiers in Upper Silesia, his palpable untruths on the Porto Barros question, and the un-negotiated withdrawal of the Italian garrison from Adalia increased his unpopularity, which a gift for cheap repartee failed to attenuate.

The Fascisti were now threatened with a split when their leader Mussolini expressed sentiments of a Republican tendency. But he hastened to explain that he merely considered Fascismo as "tendentiously" Republican, and that he attached little importance to the question of the form of government, every Fascista who accepted the policy of the party based on the defence of the nation from foreign enemies without and revolution within remaining free to be a Monarchist or a Republican.

For some time an agitation had been brewing among the State employees, who demanded an increase of salaries, and while the Government recognized that they were underpaid and had undertaken to bring the whole question of civil service reform, involving a reduction of the staff and a rise in the rates of pay, before Parliament, the employees insisted on immediate concessions. As the Government refused to accede to this, a number of civil servants, including a part of the postal employees, initiated on June 2nd a system of obstruction and partial strikes. The Government rightly refused to tolerate this conduct, and while confirming its intention of presenting a civil service reform Bill to Parliament at once, dismissed or suspended many employees guilty of acts of indiscipline. The employees' committee of action demanded the condonation of these punishments, but the Government, supported by the immense majority of public opinion, for once held firm and the agitation came to an end on the 10th, the employees having gained nothing, although the public had been subjected to intolerable inconvenience. But the episode was one more proof of the

spirit of insubordination and contempt for authority by the disastrous policy of successive Governments, and particularly by that of Nitti.

Parliament was opened by the King on June 11, 1921, amid patriotic manifestations. The Socialists, Communists, and Republicans, who had indulged in such noisy demonstrations at the last opening of Parliament, did not attend, nor did the Fascisti of Republican tendencies, nor the Germans from the Alto Adige. On the debate on the speech from the Throne, while the internal policy of the Government met with moderate approval from all sections except from the Socialists and Communists, its foreign policy was severely criticized. Luigi Federzoni, the Nationalist leader, delivered a stringent attack against Count Sforza over certain clauses in the Rapallo Treaty, the abandonment of Adalia, etc. The Foreign Minister's reply made a bad impression and his position appeared to be seriously compromised. On June 26th the Cabinet obtained only a small majority on a vote of confidence, and although its Constitutional opponents stated that it was only of its foreign policy that they disapproved, and Count Sforza offered his resignation, Signor Giolitti insisted on regarding the vote as involving his policy as a whole, and the Cabinet resigned.

The crisis proved a laborious one. Although Giolitti himself could have formed a new Cabinet had he dropped Sforza he refused to do so, professing to wish to abandon politics for a time. Signor De Nicola, the popular president of the Chamber, although urgently pressed by all parties, declined the task. Finally Signor Bonomi, Treasury Minister in the late Cabinet, was entrusted with the formation of an administration and succeeded. The new Cabinet was constituted as follows : Ivanoe Bonomi, Reformist Socialist (Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior) ; Marquis Tomasi della Torretta, a career diplomat (Minister for Foreign Affairs) ; Girardini, Social Democrat (Colonies) ; Rodino', Popolare (Justice) ; Soleri, Liberal Democrat (Finance) ; De Nava, Liberal Democrat (Treasury) ; Bergamasco (Marine) ; Corbino (Education) ; Micheli, Popolare (Public Works) ; Belotti, Independent Democrat (Industry)

and Trade) ; Mauri, Popolare (Agriculture) ; Alberto Beneduce, Reformist Socialist (Labour) ; Giuffrida, Social Democrat (Post Office) ; Raineri (Liberated Provinces).

The Bonomi Cabinet was generally regarded as merely a "summer holiday" administration, and was not expected to live for more than a few months. It was completely dominated by the Partito Popolare, and indeed Don Sturzo was the real head of the Government ; even the selection of the Under-Secretaries was made under the dictation of the Sicilian priest. Under Popolare influence, strengthened by that of the semi-Socialist Ministers Giuffrida and Beneduce, the Cabinet prepared further demagogic legislation, especially with regard to land and the division of property. A Bill was actually drafted enabling any public body to expropriate land which it considered inadequately cultivated, the owners to be indemnified with land bonds of uncertain value paid for by the community as a whole. This measure was the pet scheme of the left wing Popolari, but it aroused the violent opposition of all the National parties and was condemned as preposterous by every economist in Italy. Fortunately it never became law.

Signor Bonomi's one merit was his honesty and sincere patriotism. He had joined the Army at the beginning of the war and served at the front, and when he became Minister of War in the Giolitti Cabinet he attempted to stem the orgy of mud-throwing at the Army and at all who had risked their lives for their country. As Prime Minister he decided to allow the ceremony for the Unknown Soldier to be held. The idea had been first conceived by an Italian officer, but the various Governments which had been in office since the war, in their anxiety to make the nation forget the victory, had refused to take it up. Other countries had introduced the ceremony, which they invested with a deep and religious significance, and while Britons were able to pay their tribute to the Unknown Dead at the Cenotaph in London, and Frenchmen at the Arc de l'Etoile in Paris, Italians were debarred from performing a similar rite until November, 1921. But the ceremony lost none of its moving character by the delay. Eleven bodies

of unknown soldiers were chosen from different sectors of the front and gathered together in the beautiful Byzantine Cathedral of Aquileia. On October 28th a Triestine woman, whose son had fallen in battle, was entrusted with the selection of the body to be honoured by dropping a white flower on one of the eleven biers, on which the Duke of Aosta, Commander of the famous Third Army, laid a bronze wreath. The bier was then placed on an elaborately decorated railway truck, which was covered with flowers and tricolour flags. The truck was conveyed by a special train, escorted by an armed picket of the Casale Brigade and a group of disabled war volunteers decorated with gold medals. The train travelled slowly to Rome by a devious route, so as to pass as many towns as possible, and at every station crowds of people of all classes, many of them in deep mourning—parents, wives, or children of dead soldiers whose bodies had never been found—knelt and prayed as the train rolled by; not a few felt absolutely convinced that their lost dear one was enclosed in the flower-covered coffin, and called out his name. On November 2nd the Unknown Soldier reached Rome, and after a ceremony at the station, in the presence of the King and the Royal Family, was conveyed to the Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, where Monsignor Bartolomasi, Bishop of Trieste and formerly Principal Chaplain to the Army during the war, imparted the benediction. It remained there for two days, during which enormous crowds came to pay a tribute of prayer to the Unknown Dead. The bier was conveyed to the monument of Victor Emmanuel on November 4th, the third anniversary of the Armistice, and entombed in the Altare della Patria, in the presence of the King and Royal Family, the Cabinet and other authorities, delegations from both Chambers and the battle flags of all the regiments of the Italian Army and of the Navy, while a military band played the "Canzone del Piave." On the tomb were inscribed the words "*Ignoto Mili.*" The attitude of the masses throughout this moving ceremony showed that, in spite of the Bolshevik poison which had seemed to have infected them, they were sound

at heart. It was enough for the Government to abstain from openly encouraging the revolutionary propaganda of the Reds for the real feelings of the people to appear.

Immediately after the ceremony, on November 6th, a Fascista congress was inaugurated in Rome, the moment having been selected to affirm the close connexion between Fascismo and the revival of patriotic feeling ; on that occasion Fascismo definitely became a political party, and took the name of *Partito nazionale fascista*. Mussolini set forth its programme in an important speech on the 8th. The programme differs from those of other parties inasmuch, Mussolini declares,<sup>1</sup> as it constitutes for the Fascisti not only a rule of political conduct, but also a moral code. It is "an honest programme, serious, far-seeing, and aloof from demagogic flattery. It does not disregard concrete problems . . . but it also rises to an integral vision of that Italy which at Vittorio Veneto inaugurated a new period in her history." Its main principles are as follows :

"The nation is not merely the sum-total of living individuals, nor the instrument of parties for their own ends, but an organism comprising the unlimited series of generations of which individuals are merely transient elements ; it is the supreme synthesis of all the material and non-material values of the race.

"The State is the legal incarnation of the nation. Political institutions are efficient in so far as national values find in them expression and protection."

The State must be reduced to its essential functions as a political and legal organism ; the powers of Parliament must be limited to questions concerning the individual as a citizen and the State as the organ for realizing and safeguarding the supreme interests of the nation, whereas national technical councils are alone competent to deal with the activities of individuals as producers. The State is sovereign, and its sovereignty cannot be encroached upon by the Church, on which the fullest freedom in the exercise of its spiritual functions must be conferred. The National Fascista party subordinates its attitude with regard to the

<sup>1</sup> "Programma e statuti del P.N.F.," Rome, Berlotti, pp. 5 et seq.

form of the various political institutions to the moral and material interests of the State. Corporations should be encouraged as the expression of national solidarity and as a means for developing production, but they must not submerge the individual by arbitrarily levelling all capacities. The Fascista party favours a programme of social legislation, including the eight hours' day, insurance against accidents, old age pensions, etc., and also the development of small holdings wherever they are economically advantageous.

The party intends to elevate political morality ; it aspires to govern the country in order to re-establish the principle that the country must be administered not in the interest of parties or cliques, but in that of the nation. The prestige of the State must be restored, and forces that attempt to weaken it materially and spiritually must be vigorously combated.

In the field of foreign affairs Italy must "reaffirm her right to complete historic and geographic unity, where it has not yet been achieved, fulfil her function as the bulwark of Latin civilization in the Mediterranean, establish over the alien peoples annexed to Italy the firm rule of her law, and give adequate protection to Italians living abroad, on whom the franchise should be conferred." Fascismo does not believe in the vitality of the League of Nations, because not all nations form part of it, and those who do are not all on an equal footing. Nor does it believe in the various internationals, red, white, or of other hues. Friendly relations should be established with the peoples of the Near East and the Far East.

After the re-establishment of the authority of the State against the forces of dissolution, the most important aspect of Fascista activity was its economic and financial policy. The party was determined to secure the effective responsibility of individuals and corporations for all violations of labour agreements freely contracted, and that of public servants for injury to individuals due to negligence. Incomes liable to taxation should be made public, so that control may be exercised on the financial obligations of all citizens towards the State. If the intervention of the State is

necessary to protect certain branches of agriculture and industry against a too dangerous foreign competition, this protection must be such as to stimulate the productive energies of the country and not merely to enable certain plutocratic groups to exploit the economy of the nation. The State Budget and that of the local bodies must be balanced and placed on a sound basis by means of rigid economies on all parasitic or plethoric organisms and on unnecessary expenditure, while the whole administration must be simplified and decentralized. No more subsidies must be granted to co-operative societies and other non-self-supporting institutions not necessary for the nation, the taxation system must be simplified, demagogic finance which discourages production and saving abolished, public works granted for electoral purposes or for the supposed maintenance of public order suspended, and the whole system of public works overhauled and re-established on a sound, co-ordinated basis, regardless of local particularism and having in view the interests of the nation as a whole. Fascismo recognizes the social function of private property, is determined to set up a system of discipline over class struggles, and therefore proposes that both employers' and labour organizations shall be legally recognized and invested with responsibility ; no strikes in the public services shall be permitted, all conflicts concerning them to be submitted to arbitral courts. The State must hand back to private enterprise all industrial undertakings which it has proved incapable of running, particularly the railways and the telephones, while even in the postal and telegraph services the State should no longer enjoy a monopoly, and private enterprise must be able to supplement or even substitute it.

The programme also deals with education, justice, and national defence, and in all these fields Fascismo wishes to operate so that its principles may be applied. In the political field Fascismo admits all who sincerely accept its principles, and stimulates individual intelligence by uniting its adherents into *gruppi di competenza* according to their particular qualities and experience. Finally, the Fascista party is indissolubly bound up with its *squadre*—the volun-

teer militia at the service of the State, the living force in which is embodied and defended the Fascista idea.

In an annex to this programme are contained the general regulations for the party organization. The party is "a voluntary militia placed at the service of the nation. It bases its activity on three fundamental principles : order, discipline, hierarchy." Its organs are the following : the National Council, composed of the members of the central committee and the political provincial secretaries, which is the organ of control of the Faschi ; the Central Committee, composed of the representatives of the various regions of Italy and the members of the directorate, elected by the National Congress for one year, which conducts the political and administrative action of the Faschi, and is invested with disciplinary authority over its own members and all the dependent organizations ; the Party Directorate, which is the executive organ of the central committee, composed of the secretary-general and ten other members elected by the National Congress, and among other functions it administers the party funds ; the General Secretariat, consisting of the secretary-general, two political and one administrative secretaries, appointed by the central committee at the suggestion of the party directorate ; the Faschi or sections of the party, which may be constituted wherever there are at least twenty Fascisti, each Fascio being managed by a directorate and a political secretary ; all the Faschi of each province must constitute themselves into a provincial federation ; every Fascio comprises a group of persons especially qualified by their studies, profession, experience, etc., forming a *gruppo di competenza*, while the civil servants, employees, and workmen in the various public services, who are Fascisti, form technical groups ; the *Squadre di Combattimento*, one or more in every Fascio, are created in order to repel the violence of adversaries and to be ready at the summons of the leading organs for the defence of the supreme interests of the nation, and are composed of all the Fascisti ; each squadra, in agreement with the directorate, elects its own commander, and where there are several squadre the commanders designate a general com-

mander to the directorate which makes the appointment ; all the squadre take orders from the inspector-general attached to the general secretariat of the party ; finally there is the Parliamentary group composed of all the Fascista deputies, which adopts a line of conduct with regard to political parliamentary situations, after hearing the opinion of the party directorate. There are in addition a number of other groups and organs—students groups, *avanguardie giovanili*, composed of youths between fifteen and eighteen years of age, women's groups, etc.

The congress continued to sit after the party had been constituted and dealt with various matters. The discipline of the Fascisti was not then as strict as it afterwards became, and a few conflicts occurred between them and their Communist opponents, but nothing happened which could be regarded as a provocation ; it was merely the presence in the capital of so large a number of Fascisti which induced both Communists and Socialists to proclaim a general strike in the hope of impressing the population with their own strength and counteracting the effect produced by the spectacle of so many thousands of Black Shirts in military formation. On the 10th and 11th disorders broke out in various parts of the city, resulting in the death of five persons and the wounding of a larger number. The tramway service was suspended and a hundred railwaymen of the Rome area struck, their example being followed in Naples. By the 14th the troubles had ceased, and immediately after the Fascisti departed.

During the same months there were some unimportant strikes among the metal workers of Liguria and Trieste and a movement of obstruction among certain groups of civil servants in Rome. The debate in Parliament over the election of the Communist Misiano led to a series of lively incidents. He had, as we have seen, deserted from the Army during the war and conducted an anti-Italian propaganda in the war prisoners' camps in Germany and Austria. He was condemned to death by default by a court martial, but having been elected to Parliament at the disastrous elections of 1919 he was able to return to Italy under the

guarantee of parliamentary immunity. During his first Parliament his presence caused no reaction, and his presence passed almost unnoticed. He was subsequently amnestied under the Nitti decree, but after the dissolution he was prosecuted for other offences and condemned to a term of imprisonment, thereby becoming ineligible. In 1921 he stood once more and was elected for Turin, but his election was contested on account of his conviction, and on December 3rd the matter came up for debate in the Chamber. While the discussion was going on Misiano himself appeared, thereby producing an uproar ; the majority of the deputics left the Chamber, and the debate had to be suspended for want of a quorum. Again on the 10th and 13th the debates had to be suspended for the same reason, and finally he was warned off the premises, and on the 20th his election was annulled ; he subsequently left Italy for the more congenial atmosphere of Russia. The whole episode was characteristic of the Communist mentality, but its outcome was a sign of a re-awakening national spirit.

Relations between Italy and Britain were becoming more amicable, but there was still some bitterness against France on account of her policy in support of Yugoslavia against Italian claims. This was manifested on the occasion of Marshal Fayolle's visit to Italy to inaugurate a monument to the French soldiers who had fallen on the Italian front ; at Turin and afterwards at Venice he met with a very unfriendly reception on the part of the Nationalists and Fascisti. Later, in November, at the Washington disarmament conference a French newspaper printed a report of a supposed incident between Senator Schanzer, chief of the Italian delegation, and M. Briand, who was stated to have made insulting remarks about the Italian Army. In consequence anti-French demonstrations broke out at Turin, where the students wrecked the French Consulate. Both delegations afterwards denied that any incident of the kind had ever occurred, and it was in fact discovered that the story had been concocted by the unscrupulous correspondent of the *Echo de Paris* with the object of

promoting mischief between the two countries. For some time attempts had been made to negotiate a commercial treaty with Russia, partly to please the extremists and partly because there were people in Italy who believed in the advantage of resuming trade relations with Russia. The agreement was concluded, but on December 5th the Marquis della Torretta was obliged to admit to Parliament that the Soviet Government had refused to ratify it. Early in January, 1922, a meeting of the Supreme Council was held at Cannes, attended by Signor Bonomi on behalf of Italy; the conference broke down on account of the fall of the French Cabinet, but a decision was taken to convoke an economic conference at Genoa in March, to which all European Powers, including Germany and Russia, and also the United States, were to be invited.

The Bonomi Cabinet had lasted longer than most people expected, but its position was weakening daily. The attempt by the Government to settle the agrarian strikes in the Province of Cremona broke down, and Attilio Boldori, the Socialist Vice-President of the Provincial Council, was shot dead in a conflict with the Fascisti. At Genoa the seamen's organization were constantly holding up steamers about to sail in order to extort higher wages and other advantages, in flagrant violation of the signed agreements. Similar incidents occurred in other Italian ports, with the result that sea-borne trade was becoming impossible. This, the leaders of the unions hoped, would either drive the owners in despair to sell their ships to the unions at an extremely low price, or induce the Government to requisition them and sell them to the said unions, as had been done in the case of several steamers sold to the "Garibaldi" co-operative society for a mere fraction of their real value. Other strikes and disorders occurred here and there, and although they were less serious than some of the previous ones, they kept the country in a state of constant ferment, to the detriment of every form of productive activity. Signor Bonomi was now between not two but many fires. The Democrats accused him of being too conciliatory towards both the Popolari and the Fascisti, the Right wing of the

Liberals as too feeble in repressing the forces of revolution, while the Socialists, Communists, and Popolari demanded drastic action against the Fascisti. On February 2nd the Democratic group, sixteen members of which were ministers or under-secretaries, went definitely over to the opposition and Bonomi felt forced to resign. Another protracted crisis now began ; the first attempts were made at collaboration between the Democrats and the more moderate Socialists, but as yet without success. The King sent for Signor De Nicola, President of the Chamber and a man respected by all parties ; but he failed in his task, and on the 9th the King rejected Bonomi's resignation and asked him to go before Parliament in order that by its vote it might give a clear indication for a solution of the crisis. The Cabinet was beaten by 295 votes to 127 on the 17th, and resigned for the second time. After further unsuccessful attempts at forming a new Ministry, wrecked by the intrigues of the Partito Popolare, Luigi Facta was entrusted with the task, and on the 25th—twenty-three days after the opening of the crisis—he had formed a Cabinet. Signor Facta was a thoroughly honest man, but of extremely modest capacities ; he had been Minister several times, but owed the success of his career, such as it was, exclusively to his unswerving devotion to Giolitti, who, like certain famous actresses, was wont to surround himself with stars of the second or third rank, on whose fidelity he could count and whose services he did not forget. No one was more surprised at this sudden accession to office than Facta himself, and his acceptance, at so difficult a moment, when no one else would undertake the task, is certainly to the credit of his honesty and patriotism. As usual he took the portfolio of the Interior, as well as the Premiership, and he selected his colleagues from all the groups except the Socialists and Communists and the Fascisti ; Senator Carlo Schanzer, who had been Italian delegate at the first two Assemblies of the League of Nations and at the Washington Naval Conference, became Minister of Foreign Affairs ; he was a man of wide legal knowledge, a very hard and conscientious worker, but not fired with great enthusiasm nor likely to inspire it in others.

He had recently acquired familiarity with international questions, and he could be counted on to deal prudently with them, but was not brilliant in his conceptions nor likely to adopt solutions requiring the heroic touch. The other Ministers were mostly of respectable mediocrity, except Luigi Rossi (Justice), Camillo Peano (Treasury), and Dello Sbarba (Labour), who were decidedly below that standard. It was not likely that such a team could draw the coach of State easily over the very difficult country which it was destined to traverse.

On March 15th Signor Facta set forth the Government's programme before the Chamber, a document which differed but little from the programmes of most of his predecessors, and contained the usual undertaking to restore order, which was to remain a dead letter, and the usual outflow of well-meaning but empty rhetoric. In this connexion Senator Scialoja made one of his celebrated *bons mots*; when he was first shown the programme, he exclaimed with feigned astonishment: "But there is an error in the signature. It is signed *Facta*, whereas it should have been signed *Verba*." The Cabinet obtained a vote of confidence from the Chamber, and at first its course ran fairly smooth. The only serious labour troubles were in the Port of Naples. The conditions of that port had become nearly as bad as those of Genoa, owing to the preposterous impositions of the Red unions, but the Fascisti had recently created a dockers' union of their own in order to combat the anarchy and graft engendered by the predominance of the rival organization. The Fascista dockers were harder workers, more honest and amenable to discipline than the Reds, and gained the favour of the public, whom they served better, but naturally they came into conflict with their opponents, who were determined to preserve the extremely profitable monopoly of port labour. The Red unions therefore proclaimed a strike in all the ports of Italy on March 18th as a protest against the activities of the Fascista dockers, whom they wished to exclude. On the 28th the Government, in order to put an end to the strike which was holding up the maritime trade of the country, referred the controversy to the *ente*

*autonomo* of the Port of Naples, and instructed the authorities to do the same in other ports where such bodies existed, and to entrust the solution to the harbour masters elsewhere. This decision caused much dissatisfaction in all but Socialist circles, as the *enti autonomi* were notoriously under the influence of the Red organizations. Eventually, however, the Fascisti gained their point at Naples and succeeded in re-establishing freedom of labour, to the great advantage of the port and of the trade of the country. It was one of their most striking labour victories.

In the meanwhile the Genoa Conference, which was to have begun on March 8th, had been postponed on account of the Cabinet crisis, and was inaugurated on April 10th. Although in some quarters the presence of the Soviet delegates caused anxiety, the gathering aroused great interest and exaggerated expectations in Italy ; but public interest was based more on the fact that the conference was being held in Italy than on its intrinsic character and importance. This is not the place to write the history of the conference, but some of its aspects and episodes have a bearing on internal events in Italy. No conflict between the Italian and foreign delegations occurred. Signor Facta presided with dignity, while Senator Schanzer proved an indefatigable worker and succeeded more than once in conciliating serious differences between the British and French delegates and between the latter and the Russians. The Russian delegation, presided over by M. Chicherin, was somewhat alarmed as to the reception it was likely to meet with at the hands of the Fascisti, but the party directorate of the latter reassured the timorous Bolsheviks that, as long as they abstained from interference in Italian internal politics and from propaganda, they would not be molested ; they undertook to do so, and apparently abided by their promise. The Italian authorities took the most elaborate police measures to protect the safety of their persons ; they reached Genoa without incident, and were installed at the Imperial Palace Hotel at Santa Margherita, one of the most luxurious establishments in Italy, in a style that seemed hardly suitable for the representatives of a "proletarian"

Government. Some Italian Communist leaders called on them, but showed great prudence in their dealings with the Russians, as they too had been warned by the Fascisti to abstain from making use of the presence of their Moscow comrades for propaganda or political demonstrations. To understand the effects of the Russian visit to Genoa on Italian revolutionary circles certain foibles of the latter require explanation. In Italy the revolutionary parties have always been hidebound by the most rigid conventions ; the true revolutionist must always be dirty and untidy in his person ; he must never be seen in evening clothes or a morning coat, while a silk hat is anathema. Although he may, and often does, eat expensive food and live in luxury, he must not do so in public ; he may get drunk in public, as drunkenness is a "proletarian" vice and therefore a virtue. Even so sensible and broadminded a man as the late Leonida Bissolati is said to have refused a portfolio because he could not make up his mind to wear a frock coat, and although there were other reasons for his refusal, that was the one generally believed and regarded as quite adequate by the public.

When the members of the Soviet delegation came to Genoa, were entertained by the King at lunch on board a battleship, hobnobbed with the Archbishop and wore dress clothes that might have passed muster in Savile Row, the Italian Communists felt the ground quaking beneath their feet. Trifles such as these did more to shake the confidence of the working masses in Socialism and Communism than any amount of counter-propaganda. It is to the writer's knowledge that Chicherin requested Senator Schanzer not to have him invited to lunch with His Majesty, but the Italian Minister informed him that he would certainly be invited and expected to accept. Had he not been invited he would have had a grievance and might well have complained that he had been treated with less courtesy than the other delegates. He was therefore invited and did lunch with the King. The effect produced on the Italian revolutionists was remarkable.<sup>1</sup> All save a few "die-

<sup>1</sup> The Anarchist Malatesta concluded a speech at a Communist meeting on May 1st with the slogan : "Viva la Russia *senza* Chicherin ! "

hards " realized that Soviet Russia needed recognition from the Powers more than the latter needed Russian trade, and that the Moscow Government, as a source of assistance to Western Communism, was a broken reed. The Russian delegates also proved very inferior diplomats and wholly out of touch with European political thought, thus causing deep disappointment to their friends.

The actual results of the conference, if not absolutely nugatory, were meagre and hardly justified all the pomp and advertisement surrounding it. But something was achieved from the point of view of Italian interests, inasmuch as it made the numerous foreign delegates see for themselves that Italy, in spite of the strikes, was really beginning to reconstruct, that she was capable of organizing a great gathering of peoples in a satisfactory and dignified manner, and that the most perfect order was maintained throughout. The great popular enthusiasm with which the King was acclaimed showed that, in spite of Red propaganda, the Monarchy was still popular.

For many years the 1st of May had been recognized as the Feast of Labour (with capitals), on which the working classes made holiday and manifested in favour of Socialism and the International, but it was only since the Armistice that the railwaymen had taken to suspending work on that day. It was hoped that in 1922 this would not occur, but a day or two before the 1st the railwaymen's syndicate at Bologna issued an order that all traffic was to be held up on May 1st. As a matter of fact, the Government was able to secure an almost complete service, but a number of railwaymen did fail to go to work and considerable confusion and delay were caused. The members of the executive committee of the syndicate were referred to the judicial authorities for having incited their followers to quit work without any justification. This energetic action produced a good impression, and some of the ringleaders were actually punished, although not as severely as might have appeared desirable.

May 24th, the seventh anniversary of Italy's intervention in the war, was celebrated with great solemnity all over

the country, and that day was selected for the interment at the Campo Verano Cemetery in Rome of the body of Enrico Toti, a popular Roman war hero, who, although he had lost a leg through an accident before the war, had insisted on joining the Army as a volunteer, behaved with extraordinary heroism, and was killed on the Carso front while cutting wire entanglements. On its way to the cemetery the funeral procession, escorted by numbers of Fascisti and other citizens, was fired on from various houses in the San Lorenzo quarter, notoriously a hotbed of revolutionary elements ; no reprisals were attempted at the moment, but on its return the cortège was again fired on repeatedly, and this time the Fascisti and Nationalists retaliated. In the conflict which occurred two persons were killed and a large number wounded. The following day the "Committee of Proletarian Defence" and the *Alleanza del Lavoro*<sup>1</sup> proclaimed a general strike in Rome, in which the tramwaymen, the printers, and some of the cab drivers and taxi chauffeurs took part, but the shops remained open and the railway and postal services were unaffected. The Fascisti tried to organize a counter-demonstration, but were dispersed by the police. The strike ended on the 26th, and if the episode was not in itself very important, it served to intensify the exasperation of the mass of the public against the brutality of the Reds and their utter disregard for the interests as well as the sentiments of the community as a whole, and to convince it that the present state of things was becoming absolutely intolerable. It was considered somewhat surprising, in these circumstances, that the Socialist Parliamentary group on June 1st voted a resolution presented by Zirardini that it was prepared to support any Ministry which undertook to secure the re-establishment of law and liberty.

The situation in the Bologna area was again becoming critical. The power of the Red agricultural unions had been greatly shaken throughout the province by the action

<sup>1</sup> This was a newly constituted coalition of the Communist, Socialist and Republican parties and the G.C.L., the latter collaborating only in certain eventualities.

of the Fascisti, and many of them had gone over to the Fasci in a body. But the leaders, feeling that popular support was slipping away from them, tried to bolster themselves up through the favour of the Government authorities, particularly of the Prefect, Signor Mori. The high wages and other privileges of the agricultural labourers in the province had reached such a point that their employment had ceased to be profitable, and farming was threatened with a general paralysis. But in the neighbouring provinces there was a good deal of agricultural unemployment, and numbers of labourers tended to migrate to Bologna, where they were ready to accept lower wages than those imposed by the Red unions. As this threatened to break their monopoly, the unions brought pressure to bear on Signor Mori and induced him to issue an ordinance forbidding the migration of labourers from the adjoining provinces into the province of Bologna, and even, in some cases, from one commune to another in that same province. This decree, which was quite unconstitutional inasmuch as it violated the elementary rights of the individual, exclusively in the interests of a grasping and highly privileged class, aroused widespread indignation. The Fascisti voiced this feeling and proceeded to concentrate in Bologna from all parts of the neighbourhood in military formation, and encamped in the squares and public gardens. On June 1st they demanded the revocation of the obnoxious decree and the recall of the Prefect. Their action was of course illegal, but it was provoked by a greater illegality on the part of those whose business it was to secure respect for the law, and they were backed up by public opinion in all the provinces bordering on that of Bologna and by the whole of the middle classes and a considerable part of the labouring masses in Bologna itself. Signor Mussolini in the meanwhile was negotiating with the Government, and, being sure of having gained his point, he ordered the Black Shirt squadre to demobilize and evacuate Bologna on June 2nd; this was done at once, with the most perfect discipline. The obnoxious decree was subsequently revoked and Mori transferred elsewhere. This was undoubtedly a remarkable Fascista victory and a

proof of their strength, and while it secured them the sympathies of ever wider strata of the population, it also contributed not a little to discredit the Government and weaken its already declining prestige. It was clear to all that the State authorities were no more capable of exercising influence over the Fascisti than they had been repressing the excesses of the revolutionary elements. Even the late Baron Sonnino, then no longer in active politics, declared at this time that if Italy was to be saved from disintegration some form of *coup d'état* was necessary.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE BREAKDOWN OF THE POLITICIANS

**I**N the meanwhile the various parliamentary parties were busy preparing for the next Ministerial crisis. They regarded the Facta Cabinet as a mere stop-gap, and each group was trying to pave the way for a new administration more in conformity with its own aspirations. Lobby intrigue assumed an activity never equalled before. The chief point at issue was the "collaborationist" question. Within the Socialist party the problem of accepting the idea of collaborating with a bourgeois Government which should offer guarantees for the realization of certain Socialist demands was hotly debated. The leaders of the collaborationist group, Turati, Treves, and Modigliani, worked hard to convince their comrades of the advisability of such a policy, and at one moment it seemed as though it had a good chance of being adopted by the party and of materializing. Among several of the other parties there was a regular competition to secure the support of the collaborationist Socialists for the formation of the future Cabinet, as it was believed that a combination with the moderate Reds would secure it a long tenure of office—whether it would prove advantageous to the country was not considered by eager place-hunters. The Fascisti, Nationalists, and the Right generally were rigidly opposed to this experiment, for the following reasons: revolutionary Socialism was now no longer a serious danger; the Communists might commit occasional outrages and acts of terrorism, but they had lost the support of a large proportion of the labouring masses, by whom the Bolshevik paradise was no longer believed in. But collaboration represented a much more real and insidious danger. The urgent need of the country was the restoration of the national finances, and this could

only be achieved by the most stringent economy in the public services, by attracting capital towards sound investments, and by promoting harder work, increased output and private economy among all classes and in all trades. The collaborationist Socialists, although they professed to reject revolutionary violence, made no secret of their intention of destroying the "capitalist" State by means of peaceful penetration. Their whole financial policy was based on an ever-wider Government interference in trade, the development of all forms of Government economic activity and nationalization, with the attendant evils of extravagance, inefficiency, wastefulness, and graft, as well as the creation of more and more sinecures for Socialist organizers and socialistically inclined Democrats. As Professor Pantalconi paradoxically said, every hard-working Italian had to maintain three or four Socialists in idleness. The policy also implied an ever-growing army of public servants and State workmen, overpaid and underworked, and amenable to Socialist propaganda, thus raising enemies of the State within the State itself. To pay for all this, capital would have to be taxed to the verge of confiscation, if not beyond it; private enterprise would be ruined, the cost of living raised to an impossible level, and the currency depreciated to zero. Final result: bankruptcy, chaos, and revolution. The more intelligent Socialist leaders knew all this perfectly well, and wished it to come to pass, because, even in conditions like those of Russia, there are always advantages for the masters, while the more ignorant members of the party and fatuous Democrats brought up on rhetoric believed that somehow or other shibboleths would supply the lack of real wealth and that economic laws might safely be disregarded as long as "principles" were saved. The danger was very serious, as the country risked being bled to death without perceiving it. This was realized by the Fascisti and Nationalists and a few others, while the Government simply drifted on, giving ever-fresh evidence of its impotence.

On July 12th Signor Peano, the Treasury Minister, issued his financial statement for 1921-1922, which should have

opened the eyes of the most purblind. The deficit amounted to 6,500 milliards—double the figure of the previous estimates—and no adequate measures were proposed with which to cover it. Public opinion was now seriously alarmed at the situation, and rapidly lost all confidence in the ability of the men then in power to cope with it. In Parliament hardly anyone troubled about finance, but one plan after another for forming a new Cabinet was evolved. De Nicola, Giolitti, Bonomi, and Orlando were approached in turn, while the work of undermining Facta's position continued with increasing intensity. Never had the Chamber offered a more contemptible spectacle. The Fascisti purposely abstained from taking any part in these intrigues, but the party definitely declared that it must not be excluded from any Coalition Government which might eventually be formed.

The crisis, which had been expected from day to day, broke out on July 19th, the immediate cause being certain incidents which had occurred at Cremona. The town and province had been the scene of a series of strikes and riots, mostly of an agrarian character, for which the Popolari were quite as responsible as the Socialists and Communists. Cremona was in fact the head-quarters of the Left wing of the Popular party, led by Signor Miglioli, which was following the usual tactics of trying to outbid the Socialists for the favour of the masses, and between the two the whole of this rich agricultural district was kept in a state of perpetual turmoil, to the serious detriment of production. The Fascisti of the province had been conducting an active campaign against the promoters of disorder, and in July a sudden mobilization of their forces was ordered. In spite of the rigorous measures adopted by the authorities, the Black Shirts concentrated in the town on July 12th, wrecked the Socialist head-quarters at the Camera del Lavoro and some other Red institutions, and a couple of days later they dealt similarly with Miglioli's chambers. But the incidents were less serious than the opponents of the Fascio tried to make out. Popolari and Socialists purposely exaggerated them and made scenes in the Chamber, and Signor Miglioli

tearfully described how his ancestral home, where generations of Migliolis had flourished, had been razed to the ground, whereas the Fascisti had merely wrecked some rooms rented by him. The Democratic groups saw in this situation merely an opportunity for provoking a Cabinet crisis, and formed an alliance with the Popolari for that purpose, to which the Socialists also adhered. On the 19th the Cabinet was outvoted, and the next day it resigned.

But if it was easy to provoke a crisis, it was far more difficult to provide a solution. The problem was whether a Left Ministry were to be formed, composed of Democrats, Popolari, and moderate Socialists, or one with a broader basis, including Nationalists, Fascisti, and other groups of the Right, as well as some of the Democrats. Signor Orlando inclined to the latter view, and was himself approached from various quarters with the proposal that he should form a Ministry, after Signor Meda (Popolare) and Bonomi (Reformist Socialist), who had also been unofficially approached, had refused. But Orlando failed, and the crisis dragged on without result. During its progress the King sent for Turati to consult him as to the situation, and the Socialist leader's visit to the Quirinal was a landmark in the history of the party, as it was the first time that one of its members recognized the Monarchy. But the episode had no consequences ; it was merely a sign that Turati was itching for office, and that, having failed to achieve his end by revolutionary methods, he was trying other ways. However, as no other statesman was available or willing to assume the burden of office at this critical moment, the King was forced to summon Facta once more, and the worthy Piedmontese deputy proceeded to reconstruct his Cabinet. This he achieved with but few changes ; he himself retained the Presidency alone, entrusting the Ministry of the Interior to Senator Taddei, Prefect of Turin ; Luigi Rossi became Minister of Justice, Paratore Treasury Minister, and Soleri Minister of War. The most notable change was the appointment of Signor Taddei, as it was believed to imply the intention on the part of the Government to adopt severe measures for the restoration of order.

The new Cabinet was hardly installed when, on August 1st, a general strike was proclaimed throughout Italy. Of the many strikes which had occurred during the last three years none was more absolutely unjustified than this. The decision to proclaim it was the outcome of a resolution voted by a small majority of the central committee of the Alleanza del Lavoro, which, as we have seen, comprised the Socialist, Communist, and Republican parties and the General Confederation of Labour. The committee had met in strict secrecy at Diano Marina, and the Communists had assumed the initiative of proposing a strike with no other object than that of taking advantage of the shaky condition of the Facta Cabinet to promote a revolutionary movement and crush the Fascisti—there was no shadow of an economic grievance. The extremist Socialists supported the Communist proposal, because they were afraid of losing prestige with the masses, whose revolutionary spirit they overestimated, if they appeared less bold than the Communists. The collaborationist Socialists were inspired by similar considerations, but also by another motive. They, and above all their leader Turati, were intensely disappointed and exasperated that all their intrigues against Facta and with the Democrats and Popolari had not resulted in the formation of a Democratic-Socialist Cabinet, with Turati himself as arbiter of political elegancies. Turati hastened, on behalf of his group, to proclaim full solidarity with the strike, which he actually had the effrontery to describe as a "legalist strike" (*sciopero legalitario*), because, according to him, its object was to affirm the authority of the State against the Fascisti, who were trying to destroy it! The authority of the State, in his view, was of course identified with that leftward collaborationist experiment on which he had set his heart; but he appeared to forget the constant tireless work which he and his party had for years been performing to destroy every vestige of authority in that very State which he was now hypocritically professing to defend against its only real supporters.

The strike was announced by the *Lavoro* of Genoa on July 31st, and commenced on the following day. The

same paper published a *communiqué* of the central committee of the Alleanza del Lavoro stating that the representatives of the organizations had appointed a secret "committee of action," with full powers "for the defence of political and syndical liberty." Most of the Socialist and Communist deputies, who had promoted, or at least encouraged, the strike, did not appear in public, but remained shut up in the Chamber night and day, until all danger was past. The movement created an immense impression throughout the country, and also aroused very widespread indignation, as no one, save the Communists and a handful of Socialist intriguers, who hoped to make party capital out of it, saw the least justification for it. The Fascisti and Nationalists now made themselves the interpreters of the popular reaction. They ordered a general mobilization of all their adherents, and the Fascisti directorate issued a manifesto inviting public servants and the working classes "to shake off the yoke of the politicians by whom they were led," and concluding with the following injunction to the Government : " We give the State forty-eight hours in which to prove that it possesses authority over all its employees and those who are attempting to destroy the very existence of the nation. On the expiry of this delay Fascismo will assume full freedom of action and supplant the State, which will have proved its incompetence once more." The Fascisti were ordered to hold themselves in readiness for immediate action. The order was obeyed, and masses of Black Shirts, perfectly disciplined and armed, appeared in every town and village of Italy as if by magic.

As usual, a part of the railwaymen struck, especially in the North, but the Fascisti and their sympathizers supplanted the strikers in all the essential services, so that on no line was the circulation of trains interrupted ; many trains were run by Fascista railwaymen, of which there was now a considerable number, reinforced by amateurs belonging to the various national parties. In most towns the tramwaymen struck, but here too the Fascisti and other volunteers managed to run a reduced service ; no fares were charged, the cars were decorated with tricolour flags,

and it was noticed that no male passenger was allowed a seat if there were ladies standing—an instance of chivalry in striking contrast with the attitude of the Reds, who systematically pushed women, children, and old people aside with insolence and even blows. The post and telegraph services were not interrupted, although a few employees abandoned their work. In many factories of North Italy work was stopped, especially in the larger cities, whereas in Florence, Naples, Bergamo, Novara, Pavia, Mantova, etc., business was carried on as usual. The newspapers did not appear in Rome, and for one day in Milan ; elsewhere they were printed. The shops nearly all remained open. A number of isolated outrages were committed by the Communists ; a train near Ancona was derailed and the engine driver killed, and another full of women and children between Sassari and Porto Torres (Sardinia), but luckily without serious casualties—this latter attempt aroused so much indignation that the authorities were actually forced by public opinion to arrest the leaders of the local railway syndicate. Conflicts between Fascisti and Communists occurred at Milan, where seven persons were killed and sixty wounded, and also at Bologna, Genoa, Livorno, Bari, Parma, etc., and several isolated Fascisti were ambushed and murdered by gangs of Reds. At Parma the Reds erected barricades, with the connivance of the authorities, who remained impassive while a regular revolutionary action was going on, and the Fascio literally had to oblige the Prefect to take strong measures for the restoration of order.

On August 2nd the Fascio intimated the cessation of the strike, and issued orders that if by midnight of that day the Government had not given proof of its determination to re-establish the reign of law, the Fascisti would occupy all the provincial capitals. The Alleanza del Lavoro, disappointed at the very partial nature of the movement and at the defection of large masses of workmen, announced that work should be resumed the next day, on the ground that the Government had given serious guarantees "for the respect and protection of freedom." A number of

manufacturers also announced that if their workmen did not return at once a lock-out would be proclaimed. The strike had indeed begun to fizzle out almost as soon as it had started, and by the 3rd it came to an end everywhere except in Rome, Bari, Ancona and a few other places, where it continued until the 4th. On the 5th the Government issued an appeal to the nation invoking internal peace, but it also authorized the Prefects to hand over their powers, wherever they deemed it necessary in the interests of order, to the military authorities. This was done at once in Ancona, Genoa, Milan, Parma, Brescia, and Livorno ; but as a matter of fact the disorders had almost ceased, owing to the energetic action of the Fascisti, and the civil authorities resumed their functions within the next eight or ten days. The troubles lasted longest at Ancona. On the 8th the Pope issued an appeal for pacification in the form of a pastoral letter to the bishops, and the same day the Fascista party ordered the demobilization of the squadre.

During these disorders the Fascisti had carried out two enterprises of the greatest importance. The number of municipalities run by Socialist, Communist, and Popular administrations was, as we have seen, very large ; those in the hands of the two former parties were, since the elections of 1920-1921, about 2,000, including important cities such as Milan, Livorno, Verona, Pavia, Vicenza, Mantova, Parma, etc. Wherever the Reds were in power the administration was conducted solely in the interests of one class and one party, usually of a small group of individuals belonging to the dominant faction, while every form of graft was indulged in and the public services, costing many times as much as they should, were incredibly inefficient. The Popular administrations were, as a rule, more honest and efficient, but they too were often run in the interests of a single party and proved very extravagant. That of Milan had long been a crying scandal, and offered the most striking example of inefficiency and dishonesty. The Socialist administration, with Signor Caldara as mayor, was not so bad as that of the Maximalist Filippetti. It had been ruled on partisan lines, on a basis of unashamed

favouritism, and very extravagantly, but without actual embezzlement on the part of the administrators, and if the public services were growing less efficient, yet they managed to function somehow. In 1915 the deficit amounted to 12,000,000 lire. During the war the activities of the municipality were almost wholly absorbed by war relief, but in this task it was assisted by numerous private relief organizations which spent many tens of millions, thus enabling it to tide over its difficulties. By 1918 the deficit had only increased to 16,000,000 but the following year the administration began to indulge in greater extravagance ; expenditure rose from 83,000,000 to 141,000,000 and the deficit reached 45,000,000. These increases were almost wholly due to the rise of salaries, the increased numbers of the staff, and the reduced hours of work. In that year the salaries bill alone amounted to over 54,000,000.<sup>1</sup> The depreciation of the currency must of course be borne in mind, but it by no means accounts for the whole of the increase. At the 1920 elections the Maximalist Socialists were returned by a small majority (55,000 votes to 50,000), and Dr. Filippetti, an undisguised Communist, was elected mayor. From that moment a perfect orgy of extravagance, inefficiency, and graft was indulged in. The tramway service, in which the lowest grade employee was paid 12,000 lire a year, became a model of mismanagement ; the fire brigade, which cost about five times as much as that of Turin, a city of half the population and more than half the area of Milan, was a hotbed of revolutionary communism, the men no longer obeying their officers and only accepting orders from their union leaders, while they seldom troubled to put out fires ; the streets were in a state of scandalous disrepair and dirt, drainage was neglected, fantastic expenditure was indulged in, such as Esperanto courses, summer holidays at the seaside or in the mountains for favoured groups of employees, numerous municipal bands, etc. The financial situation became so

<sup>1</sup> Report of the Nationalist party, *Idea Nazionale*, August 28, 1923 ; these facts were afterwards confirmed by the report of the Government inspector.

disastrous that by the middle of 1922 the municipality had to suspend the payment of part of its employees' salaries. By August 1st, there were bills for 101,000,000 overdue, and the deficit had soared up to 375,000,000. The city had lost all credit, and the attempt to float a municipal loan in New York failed completely, while the Cassa Depositi e Prestiti and the private banks refused to advance another penny. The Socialists and Communists themselves were well aware that the municipality was heading straight for bankruptcy, but they did not care. Their attitude was part of a general policy, which the Reds had been practising for many years, of reducing every institution in their hands to ruin, in order to prove to the ignorant masses that socialist ideas could not be carried out under a capitalist régime. Although repeatedly called to order by the political authorities, and in spite of its repeated promises to mend its ways, the Milan *municipio* continued its rake's progress unabashed ; in fact, it was no longer in a position to stop, so deeply involved was it in a vast system of organized graft.

The Liberal party, as well as the Fascisti, had been for some time conducting a campaign against municipal maladministration, the *Corriere della Sera* leading, and although the Socialist press and even the Democratic-Republican *Secolo* tried to whitewash the Red administrators, public opinion and the Government itself had long known the charges to be true. But the Milan commune was regarded as a sort of unholy Grail of Socialism and Communism, and the Reds threatened the Government with a revolution if it dared to touch it, although numbers of other far less guilty municipal councils had been dissolved. Another characteristic of this body, as indeed of nearly all the Red administrations, was its uncompromising anti-patriotism. Its members repeatedly extolled "those who had rebelled against the infamous war," i.e. deserters and spies, and sang the praises of "the glorious republic of the Soviets"; the municipality refused to have anything to do with the ceremonies for the Unknown Soldier and was officially absent on the occasion of the King's visit to Milan.

At the same time it supported every agitation of a revolutionary character, encouraging strikes among its own employees, who were not punished even for the gravest derelictions from duty. When the strike of August 1st took place, the mayor, although well aware of what was coming, or perhaps for that very reason, was absent from Milan attending an Esperanto congress in Austria, while several of the *assessori*, including the acting mayor Schiavi, were secretaries of the Milan Socialist section and therefore actual organizers of the strike. The tramwaymen, the employees of the electric services and of the water supply, the firemen, the gravediggers and the street-sweepers, all of them municipal employees, struck ; the town was without lighting or water until the engineers, Fascisti, and other citizens set the machinery going again. The town council was not summoned, and even when Claudio Treves wired from Rome on the 3rd to the Camera del Lavoro and to the acting mayor that the strike was over and that work must be resumed, the council refused to budge.

On that same day the Prefect, Senator Lusignoli, sent a commissioner to Palazzo Marino (the town hall) to provide for the chief public services, and as it was known that the Fascisti intended to raid the building, he had it surrounded by troops and police. But the Fascisti succeeded in getting in by a side entrance, and in a few minutes they had occupied all the offices. They gently but firmly expelled the few Socialist assessors who were on the premises, and for the first time since 1914 the tricolour was raised over the building amid scenes of frenzied popular enthusiasm. Gabriele D'Annunzio, who happened to be passing through Milan, was conducted to the Palazzo Marino, from the balcony of which he delivered a patriotic speech to the assembled crowd, invoking pacification. Such scenes had not been witnessed in Milan since the expulsion of the Austrians. The next day the Fascisti evacuated the building and handed it over to the Prefect's commissioner. The Government sent an inspector, Dr. Ricci, to inquire into the past administration, and the results of his inquiries were such that the council was dissolved (August 27th),

and a Royal Commissioner appointed. The latter proceeded to overhaul the whole of the local services, disbanded the rebellious fire brigade and created a new force, ruthlessly cut down expenses, and succeeded in converting the deficit of 375,000,000 into a surplus of 17,000,000. Although the Red town council had long violated almost every law in the administrative code and not a few in the criminal code, the Government would never have dared to dissolve it had it not been for the action of the Fascisti ; the latter had certainly deserved well of the Milanese citizens, but the prestige of the Government was once more seriously shaken.

At Genoa the Fascisti conducted a similar enterprise against the port Consortium. Many years before, the dock labourers at Genoa were underpaid and forced to submit to the extortions of various classes of middlemen. They had therefore organized themselves into labour unions and co-operative associations for the defence of their rights—a perfectly legitimate and commendable action—and the improvement thus achieved in their conditions was wholly satisfactory. After the dockers' strike of 1900 the truck system was abolished, and the men demanded that the work be divided into shifts so that a minimum amount of employment should be secured for each labourer. A period of perpetual agitation now began and lasted until in 1903 the port Consortium was created to deal with all matters concerning labour, trade, and shipping. The first president, General Canzio, converted the port regime from one of absolute freedom into a system of class protection and closed co-operative societies for each branch of port labour. This system and the increased use of machinery reduced the number of casual labourers. But gradually the various dockers' co-operative societies adopted cast-iron regulations which made it impossible for any outsider to enter them even when there was scarcity of labour, and by allowing only one co-operative for each branch the monopoly was secured for the Red unions, who came absolutely to dominate the port. The employers could only obtain labour through the co-operatives, and while the method had some

advantages, abuses crept in, and the worst labourers were placed on a footing of absolute equality with the best—the worst were indeed usually the most influential members of the unions and co-operatives. The dockers' union was in close touch with the seamen's union, despotically ruled by Captain Giulietti, half adventurer and half fanatical maniac. Gradually the whole trade of the port came to be at the mercy of the unions ; one strike followed another, ships about to sail were liable to be held up at the caprice of the seamen, loading and unloading was suspended at the caprice of the dockers. Fantastic demands would be suddenly advanced with the threat of a strike if they were not granted, and the trade of Italy's greatest port was paralysed. This state of things continued to some extent even during the war, but the Government generally gave way to the men's demands in order to avoid trouble. After the Armistice things went from bad to worse ; wages were raised to such heights that the cost of handling goods became almost prohibitive. The shipping companies were forced by the unions to collect the men's subscriptions from their wages and pay them into the unions' coffers directly, so as to prevent any backsliding. What was worse, no one could count on receiving goods through Genoa within a given time as operations were being constantly held up. It is true that the increased cost was due in part also to the exorbitant charges of the middlemen, lighter-owners, etc., but these merely took advantage of the general disorder to increase their own earnings.<sup>1</sup> The result was that trade began to fall away from Genoa in favour of foreign ports, and there is reason to believe that both the labour unions and the employers' associations in those ports helped to finance the Genoese unions and supply strike funds.

Since 1909 Senator Nino Ronco had been president of the Consortium, and he was very much under the influence of the dockers' co-operatives, whose monopoly he had consecrated. Occasionally he made some attempt to free the port from the tyranny of the Red organizations, and to admit new co-operatives independent of the Camera del

<sup>1</sup> *Corriere della Sera*, August 25, 1922.

Lavoro, but whenever he did so the federation of Italian port labourers threatened a national dockers' strike. A Government commission of inquiry was appointed, and the Cabinet being under Democratic and Socialist influences, it reported in favour of the Red monopoly. Senator Ronco had not a free hand, and, although an able and well-meaning man, he could not bring about any real improvement in the situation. The result of all this was that port charges had reached impossible figures ; a ton of coal discharged at Genoa cost twenty-five lire, whereas at Savona it only cost fifteen, at Spezia thirteen, at Venice fourteen.<sup>1</sup>

Although there had not occurred in the management of the Genoa Consortium anything like the scandals which had disgraced the municipality of Milan and other Socialist-ridden towns, the organization was altogether too much under the influence of the unions and co-operatives, who were running the port in the exclusive interest of their own members. Neither Senator Ronco nor the Government dared to place themselves against this powerful coalition of illicit interests. It was the Fascisti who undertook the task. Early in August the Genoa Fasci mobilized and took possession of the historic Palazzo San Giorgio, lately the scene of Mr. Lloyd George's oratorical triumphs at the Genoa Conference, without encountering any resistance. On the 8th the Fascisti on the one hand and the seamen's federation and the Camera del Lavoro on the other concluded an agreement for peaceful co-operation, through the mediation of D'Annunzio's *Legionari fiumani*, and the following day Senator Ronco resigned from the presidency of the Consortium. The latter was dissolved by the Government, and Commander Ingianni<sup>2</sup> placed in charge as Royal Commissioner, and to him the Fascisti handed over the Palazzo San Giorgio. Signor Ingianni dissolved the various Socialist co-operatives, revised and reduced the lists of dockers, getting rid of the undesirables and establishing rigid discipline. The result has been that the port is now working more satisfactorily than it ever did before. The

<sup>1</sup> *Corriere della Sera*, August 25, 1922.

<sup>2</sup> He has recently been succeeded by Admiral Cagni.

tariffs are being revised and cut down, and the extras, which almost doubled the charges, have been eliminated and the amount of coal now daily unloaded has been raised from 500 to 600 tons. A number of preposterous regulations whereby mechanical appliances were often kept idle to favour the dockers have been done away with. Discipline has improved and a rigid control is exercised so as to reduce thefts. As an instance of the general improvement, as many as seventy-five steamers have been unloaded in a single day, a figure never achieved before. All this has benefited not only Genoa itself, but Italian trade as a whole, and still further improvements are expected. While the average tonnage per month between January 1st and August 15th was 404,254, from August 16 to December 31, 1922, it had risen to 524,828.<sup>1</sup>

The Fascisti continued and extended their action against the Communist, Socialist, and even Popolare municipal administrations, and forced a number of them to resign. In most cases these bodies, elected at a moment of deep national depression and disappointment, no longer represented public opinion, and the Royal Commissioners who took over the administrations frequently discovered incredible and shameless embezzlement on the part of the mayors and assessors. Fascista action, violent and illegal as it appeared, was supported by the great majority of the inhabitants of the communes concerned, who were tired of being misgoverned and fleeced. In a few cases no doubt the Fascisti acted in the interests of some local or personal faction, independently of the good or bad record of the municipality in question. But on the whole the expulsion of the unfaithful stewards was of real benefit to the community. Very often the administrations did not wait for Fascista action, but resigned voluntarily. Sometimes the political authorities refused to accept these resignations, but as a rule the administrators themselves were so terrified of the Fascisti that they were only too anxious to clear out. The Fascisti applied the system of dosing recalcitrant

<sup>1</sup> Report of the Commercial and Statistical Department of the Consortium, *Popolo d'Italia*, February 4, 1923.

opponents with castor oil on a large scale, and punitive expeditions continued to be carried out whenever some of their comrades were murdered. In their inspections of the Camere del Lavoro, Communist clubs and houses of leading Reds it was by no means unusual for them to unearth hidden stores of arms, ammunition, and bombs, and more than one revolutionist was killed by the explosion of hand grenades which he was carrying on his person. What the Fascisti aimed at was to crush out the anti-patriotic policy of the Reds and of the left-wing Popolari and to eliminate all possibility of a Communist or Socialist revolution. Hence the *epurazione* (cleansing) of province after province, and the breaking up of the various Red organizations usually centring round the municipalities and the Camere del Lavoro. A very large part of their action was nothing more than the enforcement of the law, which the Government was too weak or too pusillanimous to undertake. This was the real justification of their conduct. In some cases Fascista action would induce the authorities to display a little more energy. But these cases were extremely rare, and what exasperated not only the Fascisti but also the great majority of good citizens was the Government's profession of being *au dessus de la mêlée* and of regarding both parties in the conflict as on an equal footing, i.e. the Fascisti who, although their methods might be technically illegal, were risking their lives to save the country from anarchy and ruin, and the Communists and Socialists who were trying to plunge it into revolution and whose ranks included the bulk of the criminal classes intent only on murder and plunder. The Government was yet further discredited by the fact that it was absolutely unable to put an end to the constant disorders and faction fights ; almost every day, but especially on Sundays, there were conflicts between Fascisti and Communists, in which blood was shed and very often dead men were left on the ground. These incidents usually occurred on the occasion of some Fascista festival, such as the inauguration of a new squadra on which the *gagliardetto* or banner was conferred, or the commemoration of some comrade who had fallen in battle or in a brush

with the Communists, and were generally, although not always, provoked by the latter. From the foundation of the Fascista movement in March, 1919, no less than 2,000 Fascisti had been killed by their opponents, almost invariably as the result of ambuscades against isolated individuals.

Another Fascista enterprise of a somewhat different character should also be mentioned. Since the Armistice the Italian northern frontier had been brought to the watershed on the Brenner, and the Treaty of St. Germain had confirmed this settlement. While the new boundary was the obviously natural one, as it corresponded to the geographical features of the country, its adoption involved the absorption by Italy of some 200,000 German-speaking Tyrolese living south of the Alps. These people had been treated by the Italian authorities with the utmost consideration ; they retained their local institutions, the right to use their own language in the schools, courts and public offices, and even the street names continued to be set up exclusively in German. But the not inconsiderable Italian minorities in these districts were placed at a disadvantage as compared with the Germans ; they were not provided with adequate Italian schools, were often actually subjected to persecution on the part of the local police, which in Bolzano was a militarized force of German-speaking natives in Austrian uniform, and could seldom obtain redress at the hands of the local German magistrates. In the mixed districts the schools were wholly German. The local German Press, usually subsidized by political institutions in Austria or Germany, were allowed to print the most scurrilous attacks on Italy, the King, and the Army, and the *Deutscher Verband*, a local pan-German organization, conducted an active anti-Italian campaign, which was also strongly supported by the four German deputies of the district and by Dr. Perathoner, the Mayor of Bolzano. The Governor of the Venezia Tridentina, as the whole province was called, Signor Credaro, a university professor and former schoolmaster, who had become a politician of extremely narrow *petit bourgeois* Radical views, was of strong pro-German

sympathies and wholly unable to grasp the importance of the new rôle which Italy was called upon to play since the war ; he reserved his favours for the German-speaking inhabitants and by his weak-kneed policy encouraged them in their anti-Italian attitude. The Press and public opinion had long demanded a more dignified conduct on the part of the authorities, but the Government preferred to let things follow their course, and even when the local German authorities violated the Italian administrative laws no action was taken. No one wished to deprive the Alto-Atesini<sup>1</sup> of their German schools and German culture, but it seemed intolerable that Italian culture should not enjoy the same facilities, that Italians should often be refused lodgings at Bolzano, and that when they did obtain them they should be prevented from exposing Italian flags from their windows on the ground that such action was forbidden by the Austrian law, which was still in force ! Finally, on September 5th Signor Credaro ordered that official notices and street names should be set up in both languages at Bolzano, Merano, and other places where the population was mixed. But the order was simply disregarded by the municipal authorities.

Then the Fascisti took the matter in hand. Fasci had been constituted at Trento and also at Bolzano, and on September 27th the party directorate demanded the resignation of Dr. Perathoner, the institution of adequate Italian schools, and the dissolution of the Bolzano town police within four days. The Government then felt bold enough to do something—the decree confirming Dr. Perathoner's recent re-election as mayor was revoked. The town council thereupon resigned, Italian schools were opened as well as German, and Italian authority at last established. The Fascisti had thus achieved in four days what the Government had failed to do in four years.

The position of the Government was daily weakening, and its prestige was almost gone. It could count on the support of no strong group in Parliament or in the country,

<sup>1</sup> The district in question is officially called the "Alto Adige," to distinguish it from the Trentino proper.

and the great mass of public opinion regarded it with ever-increasing contempt. In spite of the vote of confidence which it obtained in the Chamber on August 10th, it was already only the shadow of a Government.

There now occurred another event which was to have considerable bearing on future political developments. The Socialist party held a congress in Rome on October 1st to 3rd to decide on its attitude regarding collaboration. At this gathering the divergence of views between the collaborationists and anti-collaborationists and between the adherents of the Moscow creed and the rest of the party appeared definite and irreconcilable. The party now comprised only 61,225 registered members, as compared with 100,000 a year and a half previously ; it was split up as follows : the Maximalist resolution proposed by Serrati, the editor of the *Avanti*, was voted by 25,239 members, and that of the adherents of the Moscow International (proposed by Lazzari) by 6,777, i.e. a total of 32,106 for the uncompromising anti-collaboration tendency, which demanded the expulsion of the collaborationists ; Turati's concentration resolution obtained 19,264 votes, that of the centre group (Musatti) 7,166, that of the united action group (Baratono) 2,683 ; total for the collaborationist tendency 29,119. In addition 3,180 members abstained. The result was that the collaborationists were expelled by a majority of 2,985 votes, and formed a new Socialist party, which called itself the Unitario group, while the anti-collaborationists took the name of Maximalists. The latter were afterwards to divide once more into two groups over the question of adherence to the Moscow International.

As a result of this split the General Confederation of Labour denounced its alliance with Socialism and proclaimed its freedom of action as a non-political body. This profession of faith might be regarded as not altogether sincere and inspired by the growing political impotence of the Socialists rather than by a disbelief in their tenets, but its consequence was to weaken the forces of revolution still further. At the same time union after union broke away from Socialism and went over to Fascismo in a body.

The Partito Popolare was also divided by conflicting tendencies, and although its unity was not yet officially broken, many of its most influential members publicly expressed their disapproval of the demagogic policy of the directorate. The Pope himself, in a letter to the episcopate, vigorously enjoined on bishops and priests to abstain from taking an active part in politics. Don Sturzo had lost the support of the Vatican and was losing the allegiance of a large section of the party. The Fascista organization was growing stronger and more disciplined every day, and rapidly assumed the character of a vast political and military body.

For all these reasons the moment seemed ripe for a bold action on the part of the Fascisti. It might be thought that once the Bolshevik peril was eliminated and with it the possibility of a social revolution, the Fascisti should have been satisfied with their success and limited their action to a policy of fighting collaborationist tendencies and of speeding up the Government to a higher pitch of energy and efficiency. But this was not Mussolini's view. Mussolini firmly believed that if Italy was to be effectively reconstructed, her finances placed on a sound basis, production encouraged and prosperity re-established, the people given a chance of developing their best qualities for the good of the nation and Italy made really a great country, a reform of the body politic of a much more general character was necessary. But such a reform no Government handicapped by the existing parliamentary conditions was capable of carrying out. The men actually at the head of affairs were for the most part incompetent, and the whole class of politicians from which they and their eventual successors could be drawn did not possess the boldness and heroic qualities needed for the task. Even those among them whose intentions were good were too bound up with parliamentary and local electoral interests to be capable of striking out a new line of policy for the salvation of the country. Only a force like that of Fascismo, founded on the generous spirit and bold independence of the new generation of Italians, born in the terrible ordeal of the war

and practically independent of parliamentary politics, could achieve this task.

The first basis of the Fascista policy was its financial programme, which may be summed up in two principles : radical economy and the liberation of the State from the burden of passive public services. The admirable report drawn up by Massimo Rocca and Ottavio Corgini,<sup>1</sup> after proving the incapacity of the then existing Government to tackle the disastrous financial situation, suggests the following remedies as indispensable : (1) A committee of a few senators and business men (deputies are purposely excluded as being too closely bound up with electoral interests) to simplify the public services and eliminate useless officials. (2) The public services of an economic character, such as the railways, telephones, etc., to be handed over to private enterprise. (3) A number of useless public offices, law courts, universities, etc., to be suppressed. (4) All free or reduced railway passes to be abolished. (5) All subsidies and doles to co-operative societies to be abolished. (6) Shipping subsidies to be reduced to a few lines between the mainland, the islands, the east coast of the Adriatic and the colonies. (7) All requests for new public works, except those of absolute necessity, to the expenses of which local administrations interested in them must also contribute, to be rejected, and no useless works created for the unemployed. (8) All new railway construction to be suspended and new electrifications limited to the Genoa-Spezia and the Florence-Bologna lines. (9) Existing legislation on public services (especially tramways and local privately owned railways), which places sound and unsound enterprises on the same footing, to be revised. (10) The system of taxation to be reorganized and the Meda-Tedesco proposals to be introduced at once so as to establish order in the place of the existing chaos.

These proposals were absolutely sound, and most of the Liberals, as well as the Fascisti, accepted them. But

<sup>1</sup> "Pel risanamento della finanza pubblica," published by the Press Bureau of the Fascisti party.

Parliament, the authors of the report were convinced, as at present composed, was incapable of carrying them out. Local and personal interests, party intrigue, demagogic tendencies of the majority of politicians, and the fear of being called "reactionaries" made the task impossible. Therefore a complete transformation of the Government was necessary. This explains the hostility of Mussolini and the Fascisti in general to the so-called Liberal State, although there was no profound divergence of views between the Fascisti and the real Liberals. The only difference of opinion lay in the question of the method of carrying out the desired reforms. Another reason for the hostility of the Fascisti to the existing form of Government was the utter impossibility of obtaining a stable majority for any Cabinet, however excellent. No real reform could be carried out so long as each successive Cabinet could not count on more than a few months' lease of life, and even that insecure tenure could only be obtained by devoting half its activities to parliamentary intrigues and compromises and whittling down every useful measure to nothing at all. Things were bad enough before under the old electoral law, but proportional representation had made them infinitely worse. It was for these reasons that Mussolini was determined to get the Fascisti into power, peacefully or otherwise. He therefore began to conduct a vigorous campaign in favour of a general election. But the Facta Cabinet was not ready to face such a solution and resolutely opposed the Fascista demand. On August 23rd it issued an official *démenti* of the rumours of a dissolution, stating that a general election was unthinkable in the present state of agitation.

## CHAPTER X

### THE MARCH ON ROME

THE Fascisti now presented the following dilemma to the Government : an immediate dissolution, or the resignation of Signor Facta and the formation of a new Cabinet with five of the more important portfolios entrusted to Fascisti. Facta would not accept either alternative.

On September 29th an important gathering of Fascisti was held at Udine to consecrate the banners of various newly created Faschi of the Friuli, and Benito Mussolini delivered a notable speech containing an exposé of the Fascista programme. After dwelling on the interventionist policy, which had given birth to the Fascista spirit, he spoke on foreign affairs, criticizing the "renunciatory" policy of successive Cabinets and deplored the unfortunate results of Signor Schanzer's visit to London, where, he stated, Italy's Minister for Foreign Affairs submitted to treatment at the hands of Mr. Lloyd George "of which a representative of San Marino would have been ashamed." He significantly alluded to the existence of the Fascista Army by the side of the National Army, with its glorious traditions, a fact which he regarded as fortunate for Italy. He then made some very important declarations on the attitude of Fascismo towards the Monarchy. In a previous pronouncement he had declared that Fascismo was "tendentially Republican," as we have seen, and although he afterwards attenuated that statement, explaining that he merely meant that Fascismo might prefer Republicanism in theory, but that in the case of Italy to-day Monarchy had its advantages, a number of persons who sympathized with Fascista policy hesitated to endorse it entirely because they were attached to Monarchical principles. But at Udine Mussolini declared :

" I believe that the Monarchy has no interest in opposing what we must already call the Fascista revolution. It is not its interest to do so, because if it did it would become a target, and in that case we should be unable to spare it, because it would be for us a question of life or death. He who sympathizes with us cannot withdraw into the shadow ; he must remain in the light. We must have the courage to be Monarchists. Why are we Republicans ? In a certain sense because we see a Monarch who is not sufficiently a Monarch. Monarchy represents the historic continuity of the nation—an admirable function, a task of incalculable historic importance. On the other hand, we must prevent the Fascista revolution from staking everything. We must reconstruct : *qui si parrà la tua nobilitate.*"

The speech met with the most widespread approval. It satisfied those who believed in Monarchy—and they are the majority of the nation—and in particular it pleased the Army and the Navy, whose officers felt that their sympathy with Fascista aims did not conflict with their oath of allegiance to the Crown. Mussolini's hints at a revolution, which were a repetition of what he had said in the Chamber in the previous July, were still regarded as mere figures of speech. A few days later, speaking at Cremona to a gathering of many thousands of Black Shirts, he asked : " What is that subtle emotion which we all feel when we hear the notes of the 'Canzone del Piave' ? It means that the Piave is not an end. From the Piave, from Vittorio Veneto, from that most glorious victory, mutilated though it has been by a pusillanimous diplomacy, our banners move forward. It is from the banks of the Piave that we have set forth on our march, which will not cease until we have reached our final goal—Rome. And there will be no obstacles, neither men nor things, able to hold us up." Again, on October 5th, at Milan, Mussolini sounded a warning note. In extolling the Fascisti of Milan who had risked death in their assault on the Communist headquarters at the *Avanti* offices, he said : " This is violence. This is the violence of which I approve, which I extol. This is the violence of the Milan Fascio. And

Italian Fascismo should make it its own. Not the small individual act of violence, but the great, fine, inexorable violence of decisive hours. . . . In war-time let us adopt the Socratic formula : We must overcome our friends in good deeds, our enemies in evil deeds." The *Corriere della Sera*, he added, has declared that there are two Governments in Italy, and that the nation cannot live with two Governments ; quite so—there is one Government too many, and of the two the Fascista Government is by far the best. He quoted as evidence of this the Bolzano episode and that of San Terenzio, where, after the terrible explosion of the fort, it was the Fascisti who came to the rescue at once, carried the wounded to the hospitals, buried the dead, cleared the ruins, fed the hungry, and protected abandoned property from thieves, long before the constituted authorities appeared on the scene. He also reminded his hearers of the duties of all citizens towards the nation. "The Fascisti did not shed their blood to protect the interests of individuals or castes or classes. They did not shed it for the sake of material goods, but for the sake of an idea, of the spirit, of all that is most noble, most beautiful, most generous, most splendid in the human soul." This was the answer to those who accused Fascismo of acting in the interests of the rich against the poor, of the employers against the employed.

The whole country was now waiting anxiously for some decisive action on the part of the Fascisti, but no one had any idea as to what it was to be. A march on Rome had often been talked about, and Mussolini made no secret of his intentions in that connexion ; but most people still regarded this plan as either fantastic or merely symbolical. The strike of August 1st with which the Facta Cabinet had been unable to cope, but which the Fascisti had crushed, was the best proof of the utter incapacity of the Government, while the general support of all the best part of Italian public opinion justified a bold action.

At the end of September the Fascista party directorate held a meeting in Rome, where it entrusted Mussolini with the fullest mandate to carry out a political and, if necessary,

military action to establish Fascismo in power. Mussolini had his plan of campaign ready, and now that he was invested with adequate authority he communicated it to Michele Bianchi, the general secretary of the party, and a few intimates. In the meanwhile another great Fascista gathering was summoned at Naples for the end of October, when, under the guise of a party congress, a general review of the Fascista forces was to be held. On October 24th the congress opened, and some 40,000 Fascisti in military formation and perfectly disciplined paraded through the streets of Naples amid the enthusiastic demonstrations of the people, including 20,000 working-men. On the evening of that day Mussolini delivered a great speech at the San Carlo Theatre, in which he repeated his now well-known views on foreign affairs, internal politics, finance, etc.; above all he insisted once more on the devotion of Fascismo to the Monarchy. The dilemma which he placed before Parliament was, he said, " legality or illegality? Parliamentary conquest or insurrection? " At Milan he had demanded a general election at an early date with a reformed electoral law. The events of Bolzano had revealed the paralysis of the State, and the Fascisti demanded a dissolution and that the State should abandon its preposterous neutrality between the national and the anti-national forces. " We have demanded severe financial measures, the adjournment of the evacuation of the Third Zone in Dalmatia, five portfolios for the Fascisti, viz. the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, War, Marine, Labour, and Public Works, and the Commissionership of Aviation." Mussolini himself preferred to remain outside the Cabinet. To these demands the Government had given no answer, or rather had sent a ridiculous reply, talking of Fascista ministers without portfolios. " It is not," he continued, " a question of setting up any sort of Government, more or less capable of existing; what we have in view is the introduction into the Liberal State, which has fulfilled its functions—and they have been splendid functions indeed and are not forgotten by us—of all the forces of the new generation of Italians who have emerged from the war and the victory. This is essential,

not only for the objectives of the State, but also for those of history and of the nation." He repeated his acceptance of the monarchical idea and his devotion to the Army. "Let the Army know and remember that we, a handful of bold men, have defended it when Ministers were advising officers to go about in mufti so as to avoid conflicts."

In another speech, delivered the same day at the review of the Fascisti, he said : " I tell you with all the solemnity which the moment demands—it is a question of days, perhaps of hours—either the Government will be given to us or we shall seize it by marching on Rome." There could be no doubt as to the meaning of these words, which were received with thunderous applause and loud shouts of " To Rome ! "

That same evening at 10 p.m. the famous quadrupvirate was formed, composed of Michele Bianchi, Dr. Italo Balbo, the commander of the Fascista forces, Signor De Vecchi, an ex-officer decorated with a gold medal for valour, and General De Bono, who had greatly distinguished himself during the war as commander of the Ninth Corps on Monte Grappa, and who, as we have seen, had organized the Fascista forces. To the quadrupvirate Signor Dino Grandi, another decorated ex-officer, elected deputy in 1921, but excluded from Parliament because he was under thirty, was attached and entrusted with all the political functions of the enterprise. The Naples Congress had by now lost all interest in view of the greater events which were maturing, and rapidly broke up. Mussolini ordered the Fascisti to return at once to their homes and to keep themselves in readiness for a further call to action. The next day De Vecchi and Grandi met to concert the first move, which was to inform the King of the gravity of the situation and induce the Facta Cabinet to resign. This task was entrusted to two leaders of the Liberals in whom the Fascisti had full confidence—Signori Salandra and Orlando—the former being asked in the first place to call on Facta to resign. This he did on the 26th, but the Premier hesitated for a while, as he considered that resignation would be a dereliction of duty and appear too closely

akin to flight. Further, he wished to consult the oracle—Giolitti—who was at Cavour, his summer *villettiatura*. Salandra then requested Facta to ask the King, then at San Rossore near Pisa, to return to Rome ; to this Facta agreed, and the King returned to the capital the following evening. The result of these negotiations was that the other members of the Cabinet placed their resignations in the Premier's hands, but the latter did not resign, and the Cabinet continued to remain in office. Grandi then called on Orlando, who had just returned from Cavour, and asked him to try to induce Facta to resign ; Giolitti had told Orlando that he too thought that the Cabinet could no longer continue to remain in power in present circumstances, and that a new Cabinet, with himself (Giolitti) or one of his followers as Premier, should take its place. But this attempt to return to power, directly or by proxy, failed, as the days of Giolittism were past. However, Facta decided to follow his former chief's advice, and on the night of February 27th the Cabinet resigned.

In the meanwhile De Vecchi, Grandi, and the Fascista staff had established their head-quarters at Perugia, and the general mobilization order of the Fascista forces had been issued. Large masses of Black Shirts had concentrated in all the chief towns of Italy, while others were gathering round Rome to march on the capital as soon as the word of command should be given. What was causing the leaders of the movement the deepest anxiety was the fear of a conflict between the Fascisti and the Army, to which the immense majority of the former had belonged and to which all were profoundly attached. A similar anxiety filled the hearts of the Army officers themselves, who dreaded having to order their men to fire on those who had always stood up for the Army against the revolutionary forces and their accomplices in the Government, and who were only inspired by a desire to save Italy from ruin.

Yet another issue was raised by the Holy See. In view of a probable march on Rome the Pope sent a message to De Vecchi and Grandi asking them what attitude the Fascisti would assume towards the Church. The answer

was wholly reassuring. Mussolini had always shown the greatest deference towards the Catholic Church as embodying the religion of the vast majority of the Italian people ; strict orders were now issued that the Fascisti should abstain from quartering themselves in churches, and in general from any action derogatory to the interests or dignity of the Church. This was part of Mussolini's policy of divorcing the Church from the Partito Popolare.

De Vecchi and Grandi, before going to Perugia, had informed the King, through an intermediary, of the intentions of the Fascisti. On the morning of the 28th Signor Federzoni, the leader of the Nationalist party, telephoned to De Vecchi that the King wished to see him, and De Vecchi at once returned to Rome with Grandi. In many towns the Fascista action had already commenced, detachments of Black Shirts occupying the prefectures, police stations, post and telegraph offices, etc., and here and there conflicts with the troops and police had occurred ; at Cremona and two or three other places blood had been shed, but these incidents were very few and in no case serious. When De Vecchi and Grandi reached Rome they learned a very grave piece of news—that martial law had been proclaimed by the Government throughout Italy. This implied the general conflict between the Fascisti and the forces of the Crown which they so deeply dreaded. Measures were being taken by the authorities to prevent the Fascisti from entering the capital, and although they appeared to be of a somewhat childish and inefficient nature, civil war seemed inevitable. The newspapers had been suspended in Rome and all wheeled traffic held up, while in Milan and some other towns the Fascisti established a censorship and stopped the publication of certain papers opposed to their policy ; even the *Corriere della Sera*, which, in spite of its undoubtedly patriotism and sympathy with Fascista ideals, criticized the present revolutionary movement, was suspended—one of the few acts committed by the Fascisti during the October days which must be regarded as blameworthy.

But De Vecchi and Grandi were reassured by another

gold-medallist Fascista leader, the deputy Costanzo Ciano, who during the war had served under D'Annunzio in the Buccari enterprise and afterwards commanded the "Mas" flotilla. Ciano told them what had happened at that fateful interview between the King and Facta on the same morning of the 28th. The Premier had gone to the King to obtain the Royal signature to the decree proclaiming martial law. But His Majesty, with that political instinct which has always distinguished him on critical occasions, refused to sign—he knew that its application would inevitably involve civil war, with all its awful consequences. Signor Facta then told the King that it was too late to refuse his signature as the decree had already been issued to the Prefects and communicated to the Press. The King, greatly incensed at the lack of respect to himself and to the Royal prerogative implied by this quite irregular and illegal procedure, retorted that Signor Facta evidently ignored constitutional law, and enjoined on him to revoke the decree at once. The Prime Minister returned to the Palazzo Viminale<sup>1</sup> and carried out His Majesty's injunctions. The martial law decree was withdrawn but a few hours after it had been issued, and the danger of civil war warded off. The decision was immediately communicated to the Press and caused intense relief throughout the country.

Signor Salandra, who had been seeing the Fascista leaders repeatedly, was now entrusted with the formation of a Cabinet. He realized that things had now gone too far for a Cabinet of the old parliamentary type to be possible, as the Fascisti were predominant throughout the country; but out of deference for the King he undertook to make the attempt. At the King's request he conducted De Vecchi to the Quirinal, where His Majesty opened the conversation with the declaration : "I want the Italian people to know that I refused to sign the martial law decree," and added after a short pause, "Perhaps within a week they will have forgotten it." "No, Your Majesty," the Fascista leader replied ; "they shall not forget. We shall make them remember ! "

<sup>1</sup> The new building where the Ministry of the Interior is housed.

Later on the same day Salandra summoned De Vecchi, Grandi, and Ciano, and offered them portfolios in his Cabinet. But they would not give a definite reply until they had communicated with their chief Mussolini, who was still at Milan. The next morning (the 29th) they were able to get through to Mussolini on the telephone and communicated Salandra's proposal to him. His reply was curt and uncompromising, but decisive : " I refuse, because I do not wish the Fascista victory to be mutilated." This course was the right one, as a Coalition Government would have lacked the unity and absolute authority which were now necessary. Salandra therefore gladly resigned his mandate, and recommended the King to send for Mussolini. De Vecchi and Grandi realized that an immediate solution was imperative. A hundred thousand Fascisti were closing in on Rome from all parts of Italy, and a conflict with the troops, which the least incident might provoke, must at all costs be prevented. Mussolini had purposely kept away from Rome so as not to be involved in the negotiations for forming a Cabinet. De Vecchi and Grandi now called on General Cittadini, First A.D.C. to the King, and implored him to have Mussolini summoned at once. The reply was that the King intended to do so, and Grandi and Polverelli, the Rome correspondent of the *Popolo d'Italia*, with great difficulty, owing to the disorganization of the telephone service, managed to get through to Mussolini and inform him of the King's decision. But Mussolini said that he would not come to Rome until he had actually received the royal summons. In the meanwhile, however, the King's telegram had reached him, and he started for Rome at once.

The Fascisti had begun by taking peaceful possession of Perugia, the head-quarters of the movement. The order to arrest the Fascista leaders was received by telephone at Perugia by the men actually " wanted," who sent a suitable reply. The whole of Italy was now divided into zones, each commanded by a Fascista leader, and while a part of the forces were detailed for local occupations, the march on Rome was entrusted to a body of 70,000 men, after-

wards increased by 20,000 more from Foligno. Another reserve under the Pugliese deputy Caradonna and Captain Padovani was formed in Southern Italy, but was never called into action. In order to avoid all possibility of conflict with the troops, Mussolini had expressly provided that to each of the columns marching on Rome should be attached a distinguished general who had joined the Fascisti—De Bono, whom I have already mentioned ; Fara, a hero of many African campaigns, of the Isonzo, and the Bainsizza, and a gold medallist ; the gallant Sante Ceccherini, said to be the most decorated soldier in Italy ; Zamboni, who earned his gold medal in the Asiago area when in command of the Liguria Brigade ; and others. One column concentrated at Santa Marinella, near Civitavecchia, under the Marquis Dino Perrone Compagni of Florence, another at Monterotondo under General Fara and Ulisse Igliori (gold medallist, wounded four times) ; another between Tivoli and Valmontone, commanded by Bottai, deputy for Rome.

De Vecchi and Grandi, who had returned to Perugia, started for Rome on the morning of the 30th. On reaching Ponte Nomentano they learned that the Monterotondo column was already entering Rome amid the frenzied enthusiasm of the people. It had reached Orte by train on the previous day, and there learned that the line had been cut by the authorities beyond the station ; while an advanced guard pushed forward beyond the interruption and then on to Monterotondo by train, the line was repaired so as to enable the rest of the force and the provision trains to pass. On the 30th the first columns under Fara and Igliori entered Rome through Porta Pia—the same gate through which General Raffaele Cadorna had led his troops on September 20, 1870. The forces from the Abruzzi descended from Avezzano to Tivoli, where they could control part of the electric and water supply of the capital ; a number of the men found shelter in the Villa d'Este, and a special detachment was told off to protect the famous building and gardens, which in fact suffered no injury at all. The population provided hot meals for the Black

Shirts. The only regrettable incident occurred at Valmontone, where some Communists murdered the Fascista Lulli, but the column commander, Bottai, prevented reprisals. On the 30th some 10,000 men of this force started for Rome by train from Tivoli, the railwaymen on this line being all Fascisti, while the rest proceeded on foot. At Tor Sapienza, a picturesque Campagna tower, the trains could go no further and the 10,000 continued their march by road. At Ponte Mammolo, General Piola-Caselli, of the Rome garrison, advised Bottai to enter the city by a more devious route so as to avoid the San Lorenzo quarter, a notorious hotbed of Anarchists and Communists, but Bottai refused to take this advice and led his men into Rome through the Porta Tiburtina and San Lorenzo ; here some incidents occurred, as several shots were fired on the Fascisti, who retaliated by killing some Communists, including those suspected of complicity for the killing of Fascisti in the same quarter in June. The Perrone column had come by rail from Tuscany to Santa Marinella, and there had to encamp in the open without shelter from the pouring rain, and almost without food. This force too entered the capital on the 30th. Rome was now filled with Fascisti, whose conduct, save for a few isolated incidents, was absolutely exemplary.

Mussolini reached Rome on the morning of the same day from Milan. At many of the stations along the line he had been greeted by enthusiastic demonstrations. On reaching Rome he met a detachment of the 15th Infantry on duty in the station ; he approached the colonel and shook hands with him, saying, " My first greeting on treading the sacred soil of Rome is for the glorious Army of Vittorio Veneto. I shall be greatly obliged to you if you will transmit this message to your superiors and your inferiors." Without losing another moment he hurried to the Quirinal and presented himself to the King, still in his black shirt. His first words were, " I beg Your Majesty's forgiveness for appearing in my black shirt, but I have only just returned from the battle, fortunately a bloodless one, which we have had to wage. I bring to Your Majesty the Italy of Vittorio

Veneto, reconsecrated by the new victory, and declare myself the devoted servant of Your Majesty."

The allusion to Vittorio Veneto, which frequently occurs in Mussolini's pronouncements, is significant. For the Fascisti, and indeed for all patriotic Italians, Vittorio Veneto, the great battle which brought Italy's hereditary enemy to the dust, is a symbol of Italy's effort throughout the war and of the country's national revival. The memory of this victory proved the antidote to the poison gas of Bolshevism and anti-patriotism which successive Governments since the Armistice had allowed to develop.

Mussolini presented the Cabinet list, which he had drawn up before leaving Milan, to the King, whose comment on it was, "The excellent and well-balanced composition of the list could not have been happier." It was approved at once, and the various men whose names were contained in it accepted without hesitation.

The new Premier's first task was to provide for the immediate departure of the Black Shirts, whose presence was no longer necessary and might lead to trouble. The immense cortège first went to pay its tribute to the tomb of the Unknown Soldier on the monument to Victor Emmanuel; it then marched up the Via Nazionale, and Via 24 Maggio to the Quirinal to pay homage to the King. The beautiful piazza was thronged with people, and every window and roof black with spectators. The King appeared at the balcony between General Diaz, now Minister of War, and his colleague Admiral Thaon di Revel, Minister of Marine. Slowly the hundred thousand Black Shirts, comprising the pick of Italy's youth, marched past the King, whom they saluted in ancient Roman style, the right arm outstretched, and cheered again and again. Never had there been such a magnificent demonstration of loyalty to the Crown as this homage paid to it by the army of "revolutionists." From the Quirinal the Fascisti went to Villa Borghese, where they were reviewed by Mussolini. That same evening they departed from the capital and returned to their homes. Their discipline had been admirable throughout. Hardly an act of violence had been

committed,<sup>1</sup> not an instance of vandalism, pillage, or riotous behaviour had occurred. Their own "Intendenza" had as far as possible provided food for this great army; where the Intendenza did not arrive the population supplied the deficiency, and where even these gifts did not suffice the men went hungry without a murmur. But their orderly departure a few hours after they had entered Rome in triumph was perhaps their most remarkable achievement.

The composition of the new Cabinet was as follows: Benito Mussolini was of course Prime Minister, and according to the Italian political tradition he assumed the portfolio of the Interior, but also that of Foreign Affairs; it was thought at first that he intended to retain the latter only temporarily, but as a matter of fact he still keeps both. He was assisted by three Under Secretaries—Acerbo at the Presidency of the Council, Aldo Finzi at the Interior, and Ernesto Vassallo at the Foreign Office, the two former prominent Fascisti, the latter a Popolare. General Diaz became Minister of War, thus reviving the system of having a general at the War Office, after the not very happy results of appointing civilians, with the Social Democrat Bonardi as Under Secretary; Admiral Thaon di Revel, Minister of Marine, with the Fascista Ciano as Under Secretary for the Mercantile Marine. The Ministry of Finance was entrusted to the Fascista Professor De Stefani, perhaps the most eminent specialist in the whole Cabinet, with the Social Democrat Lissia as Under Secretary; and that of the Treasury to Professor Tangorra, Popolare, with the Nationalist Professor Alfredo Rocco as Under Secretary. Duke Colonna di Cesaro', Social Democrat and nephew of Baron Sonnino, became Postmaster-General, with the Fascista Caradonna as Under Secretary; the Nationalist Luigi Federzoni, Minister of the Colonies, with the Liberal Marchi as Under Secretary; Cesare De Vecchi, Under

<sup>1</sup> Except the aforesaid incidents at San Lorenzo, and also the murder of certain Communists who had fled from the provinces to Rome and were now killed by their fellow-townsmen.

<sup>2</sup> The Intendenza gave receipts for the supplies, and eventually full payment was effected by subscriptions raised among the Fascisti and their sympathizers. The Premier was determined that no State funds should pay for the march on Rome.

Secretary for Pensions ; the Liberal Professor Giovanni Gentile, Minister of Education, with the Fascista Dario Lupi and the Nationalist Luigi Siciliani as Under Secretaries ; the Liberal De Capitani d'Arzago, Minister of Agriculture, with Corgini, Fascista, as Under Secretary ; the Social Democrat Carnazza, Minister of Public Works, with the Fascista Sardi as Under Secretary ; the Giolittian Democrat Teofilo Rossi, Minister of Industry and Trade, with the Popolare Gronchi as Under Secretary ; the Popolare Stefano Cavazzoni, Minister of Labour, with the Fascista Gay as Under Secretary ; General Douhet, Commissioner for Military Aviation ; and Mercanti, Commissioner for Civilian Aviation.

Mussolini thus formed a Cabinet which, although predominantly Fascista, comprised members of all the chief parliamentary groups except the anti-national Socialists and Communists. Teofilo Rossi and Carnazza represented the Democratic group, to which Giolitti and Orlando belonged—Rossi had in fact been minister both in the late Cabinet and under Giolitti. The participation of the Popolari might appear in the light of a contradiction, but it should be remembered that that party comprised a Right as well as a Left wing, and the statesmen selected by Mussolini belonged to the former. Professor Tangorra did not remain long in office ; he had to resign on the grounds of ill-health and died almost immediately after. The selection of General Diaz and Admiral Thaon di Revel was particularly significant of Mussolini's attitude, inasmuch as they were closely associated with the Italian victory, the former had been Commander-in-Chief during the last phase of the war, and the latter Chief of the Naval Staff. The reason why Mussolini composed his Cabinet on so wide a basis was that, once in power, he wished to adhere as closely as possible to constitutional methods. The manner in which he came into power was in itself of course irregular, but the fact that the King had entrusted the formation of the Cabinet to a statesman with a very small parliamentary following was by no means unconstitutional. Article 65 of the *Statuto* declares in fact that " the

King appoints and dismisses his Ministers," and does not in any way limit his freedom of choice. It is only parliamentarism that has created the practice the Cabinet must be formed by a statesman commanding a majority in Parliament, or at all events that the parliamentary situation must be taken into consideration. One of the main objects of the Fascista policy was to combat and demolish the artificial structure which a degenerate parliamentarism had imposed on the country to its great detriment. Mussolini rightly claimed that, while his parliamentary following was small, his following in the country was immense. This contrast produced an impossible situation, inasmuch as the Chamber no longer represented public opinion. To give but one example, the Socialist party was represented by over 120 deputies (Communists excluded), out of a total of 535 members, i.e. over one quarter of the whole, whereas at their last congress they mustered as we have seen, barely 62,000 adherents. Hence the necessity, even according to constitutional rules, of a Fascista Cabinet, or at least one in which the Fascisti should be the predominant element. But once this result was obtained, Mussolini wished to secure the support of all the other national parties. Subsequently the situation could be regularized by a general election. But the election was not to be held until a measure of electoral reform had been introduced capable of securing a more adequate representation of public opinion and greater stability for the Government. This problem was one of those which had yet to be solved.

What struck foreign observers in the Fascista movement of October and caused many friends of Italy serious misgivings was just this irregular manner in which Mussolini had come into power. In Italy herself a certain section of public opinion, including that represented by the *Corriere della Sera* and the classical Liberal school, while sympathizing with the aims of the Fascisti, disapproved of their methods. There is no doubt that their action had been revolutionary, and revolutions in themselves are not desirable. But it must be admitted that the country was

in such a desperate condition owing to the incompetence, inefficiency, and feebleness of its governing class and the dishonesty of many leading politicians, and indeed to the break-down of the whole machinery of government, that only a revolutionary change could bring about any real improvement. Nitti had openly favoured the Socialist and Bolshevik elements ; his successors, while professing a more patriotic policy, usually gave way to the violence of the Reds, and when popular reaction, embodied in Fascismo, also adopted violent methods on the principle of *vim vi repellere*, they submitted to this form of violence as well, and proved incapable of preventing the daily conflicts which occurred between Fascisti, Communists, Socialists, and Popolari. To the mass of the Italian public the illegality of the Fascista action was more than justified by the inaction of the State ; while the Reds and even the Popolari were constantly breaking the laws the State failed to punish the law-breakers, and it was not until the Fascisti appeared on the scene that anything was done, albeit under illegal forms, to bring them to book. In districts where the mass of the hard-working citizens had for three years been tyrannized over and subjected to extortions and outrages at the hands of Communist *capilega*, the action of the Fascisti in breaking the power and sometimes the heads of these gentry, in forcing them to imbibe castor oil, in burning the clubs and co-operative stores where the Reds had their head-quarters, appeared in the light of a veritable liberation.

Another aspect of the Fascista action which secured their popularity was the manner in which they stood up for the patriotic idea. The outrages and insults which the Reds had heaped on the war, the Army, the tricolour flag, the men who had been disabled and the memory of the fallen, and the hatred they showed for Italy herself and their cringing obedience to Bolshevik Russia, if they were tolerated after the awful strain of the four years' struggle, soon produced a reaction, and the people realized the spiritual significance of the war and of Italy's share in it. Italy had fought no war since 1866 except the disastrous

campaign of Adua, which had almost broken the national spirit of the people, and while the Tripoli campaign might have revived it to some extent, its inefficient political management under the cynical Giolittian Government annulled the effects. The World War and its victorious conclusion at last gave the Italian people the pride of real nationhood and a sense of racial dignity ; these sentiments the Socialist-Communist gang tried to wipe out and to substitute a degrading and demoralizing materialism in their place. The Fascisti voiced the reaction which this contemptible attitude ended by arousing. Fascista violence was therefore regarded by all that was best in Italian public opinion as a necessary, if heroic remedy. Fascismo also won over the working masses to the patriotic idea.

It should further be remembered that the violence committed on both sides was to a large extent the result of the exuberant nature of the Italian people, intensified by four years of the most terrible war recorded in history. In every country crimes of violence have been much more frequent since the war, but in Italy the seed sown produced a crop which often amounted to real revolutionary activity. Many events which occurred in Italy during this stormy period impressed foreign and not always friendly critics as signs of impending catastrophe. On more than one occasion excited British, American, and French editors sent off their best special correspondents post haste to Italy to produce highly coloured accounts of the imminent explosion ; but on reaching their destination these eager and expectant journalists found everything apparently quiet, and had to ask their way to the nearest revolution, which they learned could not be found anywhere nearer than Russia. The real danger for Italy was not so much Bolshevism, which would probably have never been a danger at all if it had not been nursed and encouraged by Nitti, but the gradual demoralization which Socialist, Communist, and demagogic influence involved. Similarly, the Fascista movement was absolutely misunderstood by the great majority of foreigners, and would indeed have been inconceivable in any other country. A revolution

in which the authority of the State is flouted and set at naught, but the King and the Army are wildly cheered, in which the revolutionists only demand the re-establishment of law and order, respect for life and property, equal justice for all without distinction of class, retrenchment and economy in the administration, more and harder work for all, self-sacrifice and austerity of life for the common good, and a Government born of this revolution which abstains from vengeance on its beaten enemies, are indeed marvellous phenomena. We shall see in the following chapters how Mussolini and the Fascisti are endeavouring to make good, and the large measure of success which has hitherto attended their efforts.

## CHAPTER XI

### FASCISMO AT WORK

THE question of the legality or illegality of the methods by which the Fascisti came into power is now a matter of past history, and the answer should not affect our judgment as to the merits of the Fascista regime, which must chiefly be based on its actual achievements.

As soon as he had taken the oath to the King, Mussolini issued the following circular to the Prefects :—

“ Summoned by the confidence which the King reposes in me, I assume the Government of the country from to-day. I demand that all officials, from the highest to the lowest, shall do their duty intelligently and with absolute devotion to the supreme interests of the country. I shall set the example.”

The situation of the Fascista Cabinet was different from that of all its predecessors, inasmuch as Signor Mussolini was free from the trammels of parliamentary parties. In the Chamber the Fascisti were a small minority, while those of other groups who sincerely supported him, although numerous, were certainly not the majority. But in the country public opinion was overwhelmingly in his favour, and the Fascisti were perfectly organized, disciplined, whole-heartedly devoted to him, and ready to defend Fascismo by every means, including force. Mussolini therefore did not require to secure the favour of half a dozen groups in the Chamber before he could take the most trifling decision, and if many of the deputies in their hearts had no sympathy with his policy, they dared not openly oppose it. The professional politicians, who had misused their power when they had it, had now forfeited it, and few outside Parliament shed a tear over their fall. The public ceased to take any interest in parliamentary proceedings, and followed instead those of the Cabinet Councils and of

the meeting of the Gran Consiglio Fascista, formed of the chief Fascista leaders, both bodies presided over by the Prime Minister. In these meetings the new Government proceeded systematically to cleanse the Augean stables and overhaul the whole body politic.

The first measures were directed towards the re-establishment of public order. "The brawls and conflicts occurring every Sunday," Mussolini stated in a circular to the Prefects, "with their tale of killed and wounded, which dishonour the country, must absolutely cease";<sup>1</sup> and they did cease. The Government had abandoned the attitude of neutrality between the national and the anti-national forces, which Mussolini had so scathingly stigmatized at Naples, and had openly adopted a national attitude; but the Premier now insisted on the rigid maintenance of order. The Communists knew that the authorities were "not going to stand any more nonsense," and they therefore took care as a general rule to abstain from murder and outrage or insults to patriotic sentiments. The Fascisti consequently had no longer any excuse for committing reprisals. A few isolated conflicts did occur, of which the most serious was the one at Turin in December, when two Fascisti were murdered by Communists and other Fascisti retaliated by murdering several Communists; but the Government took severe measures to prevent or punish similar acts; now that Fascismo was in power it must act with absolute legality. Socialist, Communist, and Popolare municipal administrations, which after November 1 had been forced to resign by the Fascisti or had done so from fear of the latter, were at once reinstated, and the Camere del Lavoro and other Red institutions which had been occupied by the Fascisti after that same date were handed back to their own organizations; many of these, however, had freely gone over to Fascismo. In answer to a complaint by Signor De Nicola, President of the Chamber, that many deputies had been forced by the Fascisti to leave their constituencies, Mussolini reassured him that orders had been issued for the immediate withdrawal of these bans

<sup>1</sup> *Popolo d'Italia*, November 10, 1922.

of exile ; in the case of the Socialist deputy Belloni legal proceedings were instituted against the Fascisti who had attacked him. One still reads in the papers that Fascisti have been tried and condemned for actions of this kind, although in some cases no doubt the culprits escape punishment.

Newspapers which had been seized by the Fascisti or had been suppressed by them were handed back to their editorial staff. Mussolini declared that he intended to respect the freedom of the Press, but to provide for the rigid application of the law on press offences. A number of newspapers, however, had ceased publication or had turned Fascista since the advent of the new Government ; these did not include the *Avanti*, which reappeared after a short suspension, while a new Socialist organ of reformist tendencies was now started, *La Giustizia*. Nitti's *Il Paese*, whose untiring campaign of calumny and hatred against all patriotic feeling, and its perpetual incitement of every form of discontent and of international bitterness, had made it more dangerous than the purely revolutionary organs, came to an end. The Milan *Secolo*, which had been the organ of certain lachrymose sentimentalists and Republicans, occasionally coquetting with Socialism, although financed by a wealthy banker, now developed philo-Fascist tendencies. The Rome *Tribuna*, formerly Giolitti's semi-official organ, also became favourable to the Fascisti. The wealthy and influential *Corriere della Sera*, while continuing to approve of the ideals of Fascismo and praising its economic policy, severely criticized the Fascista revolution and constantly took the new Government to task for measures which it regarded as unconstitutional, partly perhaps on account of the exclusion from the Government of certain statesmen whom it supported. Several new definitely Fascista papers were also founded, such as *Il Giornale di Roma*,<sup>1</sup> *L'Impero*, etc., the former being the official organ of the Cabinet. Mussolini's own paper, *Il Popolo d'Italia* of Milan, continued to voice his views, although of course no longer edited by him, but by his brother. Mussolini's attitude towards Parliament was of a two-

<sup>1</sup> Now defunct and replaced by the *Corriere Italiano*.

fold nature ; while he despised the existing Chamber, he did not intend to conduct a policy outside the Constitution ; he therefore applied to Parliament for the full powers which were necessary to carry out the two most urgent measures of his programme—civil service reduction and reform and financial reorganization. On November 16th the Chamber met and Mussolini delivered his great speech to the astonished and disconcerted deputies. "What I am doing to-day," he began, "is an act of formal deference towards you, for which I do not ask you for any special gratitude." After alluding to the innumerable Cabinet crises, which were the result of parliamentary intrigues and personal ambitions, he declared that now for the second time after seven years the Italian people had given themselves a Government outside of, above and against any designation by Parliament—the first time was in May, 1915. "I leave to the melancholy zealots of super-constitutionalism the task of making more or less tearful dissertations on this subject." The revolution, he added, has its own rights, and he was there to defend the revolution of the Black Shirts to the utmost limit, "as a force of development, progress, and equilibrium in the history of the nation." He might, he said, have won an ultra-victory, but he would not do so, for the best wisdom is that which does not forsake one after victory. "With 300,000 armed youths ready at my orders, I might have punished all who have defamed and tried to break Fascismo. I might have made of this dead, grey hall a bivouac of armed bands (*un bivacco di manipoli*) ; I might have locked and barred Parliament and formed a Government exclusively of Fascisti. I might have done so ; but, at all events in this first phase, I refused to do so." He had instituted a Coalition Government, not with the object of securing a parliamentary majority, "but in order to bring together in aid of the nation gasping for breath all those who, above the various shades of party, wish to save the nation." He thanked the colleagues who had taken up with him the heavy burden of this hour ; he recalled with sympathy the toiling masses who had supported Fascismo, and,

interpreting the feeling of a great part of the assembly, and certainly of the majority of the Italian people, he paid a tribute of homage to the King, " who, by refusing to agree to the useless reactionary measures attempted at the last moment, had prevented civil war and made it possible for the new, impetuous Fascista current, issued from the war and the victory, to flow into the exhausted arteries of the parliamentary State."

Coming down to the details of his policy, Mussolini began by foreign affairs. Treaties, he said, must be carried out, be they good or bad, but they are not eternal ; they are the chapters of history, not its epilogue. The Treaty of Rapallo and the Santa Margherita agreement,<sup>1</sup> he said, will be presented to Parliament, and, when ratified, carried out. Italy will follow a policy of *do ut des* ; she will not give anything for nothing. Italy's policy is neither a policy of adventure nor of imperialism ; it is a policy of peace. With regard to reparations, Italy will maintain that they cannot be considered apart from the question of inter-Allied debts.

In the field of home politics, the first problem is the financial one. The Budget must be balanced as soon as possible ; rigid economies must be effected, money spent intelligently. There must be privileges neither for the bourgeoisie nor for the middle classes. The proletariat who toils need have no fear ; the Government will attend to its necessities, but without culpable demagogic indulgence. Emigration must be freed from bureaucratic trammels. The internal situation has greatly improved, but it is not as good as it might be ; episodes of violence are now sporadic, but they must cease entirely. Law and freedom for all must be enforced. Even the Fascisti, if they commit illegal acts, will be proceeded against rigorously.

In conclusion, he said, the Chamber must realize its position ; it may be dissolved within two days or two years. Full powers are now required of it because without them not one lira can be economized. But this does not exclude the collaboration of deputies and senators, which

<sup>1</sup> November 12, 1920, and October 23, 1922. The latter convention, although negotiated at Santa Margherita, was actually signed in Rome.

will always be welcome. "The country encourages us and waits. We shall give it not mere words but deeds. We solemnly undertake to purify the Budget, and we shall purify it. We want to conduct a foreign policy of peace, but also of firmness, and we shall do so. Let none of our opponents of yesterday, of to-day, of to-morrow have any illusions as to the briefness of our tenure of office. Our Government has solid foundations in the conscience of the nation, and is supported by the best and youngest generations of Italians. There is no doubt but that in these last few days a gigantic step has been taken towards the unification of sentiments. The Italian fatherland has been found once more, from North to South, from the mainland to the stout-hearted islands, which shall not be forgotten, from the homeland to the industrious colonies of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. . . . May God assist me in carrying out my arduous task to the end."

The speech was received with great applause, first from the Right alone, and thence spreading to the Centre and Left, only the Extreme Left remaining silent, while the cheers of the Democratic groups were not altogether from the heart, nor in general were those of the politicians of all parties, who saw their influence disappearing. Mussolini clearly showed his contempt for the Chamber, as he could act even without its approval and could dissolve it at any moment. The Chamber was not accustomed to being treated with such scant respect, as even the Ministers who despised it were wont to show it assumed deference. But the programme was magnificent, and for the first time for many a weary year an Italian Minister had spoken like a statesman and not like a politician. In the country the speech was acclaimed with genuine enthusiasm by all save a small minority, because it voiced the long-pent-up cry of the nation that was sick unto death of Parliament and its petty intrigues and incompetence. For years the people were accustomed to see in Parliament, or at least in the Chamber, merely an arena for undignified squabbles and personal ambitions, wherein the interests of the country were hardly considered. There was no doubt some exag-

geration in this view, as Parliament had occasionally rendered services to the country and by no means all the Ministers were incapable or dishonest. But the degeneration of the last years had aroused general scepticism as to the possibility that anything good could come out of Montecitorio. It is not therefore surprising that a man who undertook to provide for the country's needs and to cure the evils from which it was suffering, regardless of, and indeed in spite of, Parliament should secure enthusiastic and general support. On November 18th the Government obtained a vote of confidence of 306 to 116, and on the 25th, after several important measures had already been carried through, full powers for financial and bureaucratic reform were conferred on it by 275 votes to 90, after which the Chamber rose. Benito Mussolini thus had *carte blanche* to carry out his programme.

The Senate met on November 26th and 27th, and apart from the debate on current affairs, Senator Albertini, editor and proprietor of the *Corriere della Sera*, delivered an important speech embodying the views of certain Liberal circles who did not altogether endorse the methods of the new Government. He declared that he had urged on Signor Facta the necessity for forestalling a Fascista *coup d'état* by immediately including several Fascisti in the Cabinet, but that Facta had utterly failed to realize the gravity of the situation and was morally and materially absent. Facta's inertia, he said, had rendered the Fascista revolution possible. That revolution had passed off so peacefully, without bloodshed, without shocks, that one might doubt whether it had been a revolution at all, if its author had not himself set forth its character before Parliament and its possible future developments. But a wound had been inflicted on the Constitution, and he deplored that a sacred tradition which Italian history since 1848 had followed had been broken. He recognized the immense services rendered by the Fascisti to the country ; they had saved Italy from the Socialist danger, and in striving to restore the authority of the State and infusing fresh energy into its rulers they voiced the aspirations of all good Italians.

But he asked himself if it were necessary, in order to restore the authority of the State, first to shatter it to fragments. The Fascisti were in a position to get into power by absolutely legal means. Why, then, did Mussolini prefer illegal means, thereby humiliating all the powers of the State? Now, however, that the deed is done, there is no true Italian who does not wish with all his heart that Mussolini's experiment may succeed. He ended his speech with an eloquent defence of Liberalism, invoking the example of Cavour, who had refused dictatorship.

To this pronouncement Mussolini replied with the deference due to a man of Albertini's eminence and honesty. He reminded him that Italian Liberalism was itself the outcome of two revolutions—the English revolution of 1688 and the French one of 1789. He assured him that his own action was the result of protracted meditation. There was no means, he said, of injecting fresh strength into a political class that appeared utterly worn out except a revolutionary action—an action which he had deliberately desired and imposed. But he did not go beyond certain limits, nor misuse his victory. With his 300,000 Fascisti behind him no one could have resisted him, but for the sake of the country he had restrained impulses and feelings, and guided the movement into constitutional channels. He had, he asserted, no intention of abolishing the Constitution, the Chamber, the laws, or the results of the Liberal revolution. But he was determined that national discipline should not remain a mere word, nor the law a blunted weapon, nor that liberty should degenerate into licence. He once more reiterated his repudiation of the doctrine of the neutrality of the State in the conflict between the national and the anti-national forces—this foolish Rollandism he called it (after Romain Rolland's "Au dessus de la mêlée"). These declarations were favourably received, and even satisfied the hypercritical *Corriere della Sera*.<sup>1</sup>

A question which the public was asking itself was why did Mussolini not dissolve the Chamber at once and go to

<sup>1</sup> November 28, 1922.

the country. The existing Chamber, which he so greatly despised, no longer represented the feeling of the country, and elections held in present conditions would undoubtedly have returned an overwhelming Fascista majority. But the Prime Minister was chiefly preoccupied with the urgent necessity of completely overhauling the administrative and financial machinery of the State, which could no longer be delayed, and he wished to devote the whole of his own activities and those of his collaborators to that end alone. Elections are always a convulsion and distract the attention of the Government from the substance of government to its form, whereas the country needed a period of quiet in which the chief reforms could be carried out. Further, the existing Chamber was now impotent for evil, as it had been for good in the past, and Mussolini, invested by it with full powers, could drive ahead without worries of a parliamentary nature. If a general election were held and a large Fascista majority returned he would not have such a free hand as he had now, for he would be obliged to reckon with the Fascista majority, which would have included, together with a number of really sincere patriots and capable men, also some inspired by personal ambitions and not a few well-meaning amateurs. Nor would the Fascisti deputies themselves, even the best of them, be free of electoral trammels or able wholly to disregard the less reasonable demands of their constituents. It was necessary to educate the country up to Fascista standards by the force of example and by means of object-lessons of what a Fascista Government was capable of before having recourse to a dissolution. Also there was the question of electoral reform which had to be settled before new elections could be held ; we shall deal with this subject in a subsequent chapter.

Before examining the particular reforms which the new Government has carried out or is preparing, we must say a few words about its relations with the other political parties in Parliament and the country.

The most powerful force of public opinion outside Fascismo is Liberalism. A considerable number of pure Liberals cordially supported the new Government and

approved of its policy, which indeed they had long advocated before the "revolution"; several prominent Liberals were members of the Cabinet, while a large number of others held high offices in the civil service. But another section, represented by the *Corriere della Sera*, while giving the Government a certain measure of support, remained apart and were not sparing of criticism of many of its acts. As a rule they approved of its economic and financial policy, which was indeed often inspired by the view of the Liberals and based on the principle of the freeing of business from Government control and of handing back Government enterprises to private initiative. As Senator Albertini himself admitted, "The Fascisti are now acting in the economic and financial field under the guidance of Liberal principles which had been discarded during the last twenty years." Senator Einaudi, the eminent economic collaborator of the *Corriere della Sera*, often appears to be a sort of unofficial adviser on these questions to the Government, which on more than one occasion has adopted the suggestions contained in his admirable articles, and even modified measures already taken as the result of his criticisms. But this section of the Liberals, attached as they were to the old traditional principles of Italian political life, disapproved of the radical methods whereby the Fascista Government had got into power and adopted measures against which in theory they had no objections. They regarded the Cabinet, or at all events the Fascista party, as too intolerant of criticism and too absolute in its exclusion of many leading Liberals from participation in the work of the nation. While there may be some justification for these criticisms of the somewhat too exuberant nature of the Fascisti, there is also a certain amount of personal feeling at the breakdown of the class of politicians which included among its best elements a number of these same Liberals; such an attitude may not be purely altruistic, but it is human. What the Liberals seem to be aiming at is to constitute themselves into "His Majesty's Opposition" to uphold the old Liberal doctrine and prepare an alternative Government for the day when the Fascisti

will have carried out the most urgent and necessary reforms and exhausted themselves in the effort. Impartial observers will probably disapprove both of the carping tone of much Liberal criticism, which seems inclined to pick holes with everything that the Government does or does not do, and of the somewhat exaggerated vehemence of the Fascista replies.

The Liberal programme is not easy to carry out, especially in view of the divisions among the Liberals themselves. In September they had held a congress at Bologna with a view to uniting the various Liberal groups into a solid party, but without success. After the advent of the Fascisti to power the attempt was renewed, but Signor Salandra, the leader of the Right in the Chamber, was opposed to the fusion of the Right wing of the party with the Left and the formation of a Liberal-Democratic union, which would have comprised many absolutely contradictory elements. Let the two groups remain distinct, Signor Salandra said, and the party directorate must not interfere with the attitude of the Liberal deputies; it will select the men it trusts and nominate them candidates, and those who are elected will sit on the Right or on the Left according their individual convictions. This of course made the formation of a strong and united Liberal party impossible, but Salandra believed that adherence to the Fascista Government was the first duty of the Right-wing Liberals. "The Right," he wrote to Mussolini, "follows with confident sympathy your energetic effort for the restoration of the authority of the State, of internal peace and of the public finances, and is ready to collaborate with you in every act and in every sacrifice for the sake of the name and greatness of Italy."<sup>1</sup> Even among the Left-wing Liberals there were many supporters of the Cabinet. Signor Giolitti himself from the very first proclaimed his approval of the Government and instructed his followers to support it. The only uncompromising opponents among the Liberals were the Nittian group, but they were now reduced to a mere handful without authority or influence.

In the pronouncements of the Prime Minister and other

<sup>1</sup> *Giornale di Roma*, March 13, 1923.

leading Fascisti the distinction between the Fascista State and the Liberal State is constantly dwelt upon. The Government was determined that no doubt should subsist on this point. The Fascista criticism of the Liberal doctrine is based not so much on Liberal principles as on the degeneration of Liberal methods of government, which had made it possible for a factious revolutionary minority practically to dominate the country and reduce it to the appalling conditions from which the Fascisti alone saved it. "Parliamentary degeneration," writes Senator Corradini,<sup>1</sup> "was to a large extent the outcome of Liberal degeneration. The Liberals permitted and legitimized the attacks of the Democrats and Socialists against the State, their oppression of the productive organizations and classes, their annihilation of the State's authority." Liberalism gradually and progressively evolved the constitutional theory of the "anti-Government" and the "anti-State," in "the Government which always gave way, in the State which abdicated." Liberalism, born of a struggle against tyranny, ended by allowing a new tyranny of Socialists and demagogues to establish itself. Socialism was able to develop its tyrannical effort in Italy through Liberalism. The social reforms, which characterized Italian political development during the last twenty or thirty years, were to a large extent just and desirable. The elevation of the proletariat, if regarded as a liberation from class oppression, was the duty of the State. But, "on the contrary, the greater part of these rights were conceded to the proletariat by the Government as though out of hatred for all the rest of the nation and in conspiracy with the most greedy and truculent factions of the Socialist party."<sup>2</sup>

The Fascista Government was determined to put an end to this conception of the State once and for all. In a semi-official *communiqué* of January 29, 1923,<sup>3</sup> it is definitely stated that "the Mussolini Government does not share the Liberal conception of the State, but, on the contrary, maintains the Fascista conception, which signifies that

<sup>1</sup> *Giornale di Roma*, March 22, 1923.

<sup>2</sup> Corradini, *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Corriere della Sera*, January 30, 1923.

it is by no means disposed to permit sabotage of the State's action even if carried out under the most respectable garments and by indirect methods. . . . Those who for reasons of interest or principle would wish the present Government to adopt the tolerant attitude of previous Governments must persuade themselves that they are outside the reality of things." The re-establishment of the State's authority and of the nation's prestige abroad were the first tasks of the new Government, as voiced by Signor Acerbo, Under Secretary to the Presidency of the Council, in his speech at Teramo on February 5,<sup>1</sup> and Mussolini believed that they could not be achieved on the basis of Liberal principles. "Before all else, the National Government had to free itself rapidly of every form of normal and customary rules of parliamentary life. The affirmations of strength already realized by the new Government through its reforms could not have been otherwise accomplished owing to the inexorable hostility of varied shady coalitions of interests."

Mussolini himself, in his short pithy articles in *Gerarchia*, reaffirmed these views. In the February issue he stated that "every one feels that the age of the Giolittis, the Nittis, the Bonomis, the Salandras, the Orlando, and the minor gods of the parliamentary Olympus is over." New men are wanted to drive the machine. "But the machine is worn out. . . . The men of the Government, at once creatures and victims—in a game which had become swift and commonplace like a cinema of the changing parliamentary situation, had neither the time nor the will to act." In this state of things two methods might be chosen: the Russian or the Latin method. The Moscow revolution hurled itself on to the machine and smashed it into a thousand fragments. "The Fascista revolution does not demolish the whole of that delicate and complicated mechanism which is the administration of a great State, nor all at once: it proceeds by degrees and piecemeal." Its motto is *nulla dies sine linea*.

An unexpected difficulty which faced the new Govern-

<sup>1</sup> *Popolo d'Italia*, February 6, 1923.

ment at the beginning of its rule was the question of the relations between Fascismo and Nationalism. Nationalism, as we have seen, had preceded Fascismo, and had laid the first foundations of a truly national spirit in Italy. It had very largely contributed to Italy's intervention in the war, and when Fascismo arose as a reaction to the anti-patriotic attitude of the Socialists and the demagogues, it found no more valid ally than the Nationalists, who were already an organized party. The two groups constantly collaborated, and were at times indistinguishable. But while Nationalism was aristocratic (in the original Greek sense), limited to a comparatively small number of intellectual persons, Fascismo at once assumed a wider and more popular character, although in aims and ideals there was little difference between the two. During the Fascista revolution the Nationalists rendered yeoman service, and the Blue Shirts (this being the uniform adopted by the gallant *Sempre Pronti* and other Nationalist squadre) counted many victims of the assassins' knife or bomb within their ranks. When the Fascisti came into power Mussolini included several Nationalists in his Cabinet, notably Federzoni and Rocco. But a tendency soon appeared among the rank and file of the Fascista party to exclude from office and authority all who were not pure Fascisti : this was especially the case in Southern Italy, and had been manifest there even before the advent of the Fascisti to power. In those provinces the Socialist movement had but few followers, except in the Puglie, and the object of Fascismo, which developed later there than elsewhere, was to fight the local cliques which dominated the various towns and villages and owed allegiance to this or that local notable. These camarillas, seeing their power threatened, often adopted Nationalism as their standard in order to oppose the advancing tide of Fascismo and save something from the wreck. Occasionally the two parties were merely the exponents of rival personal factions. In certain districts, notably the Province of Caserta, there were quite serious conflicts between Fascisti and Nationalists. Signor Mussolini, however, was determined that these fratricidal

quarrels should cease, and one of his first acts was to institute negotiations for the fusion of the two parties. An agreement was rapidly arrived at and Fascisti and Nationalists proceeded to coalesce ; the movement was not effected all at once, but took place at different times in different districts. Within a few weeks it had been realized throughout Italy, without a hitch—a most happy consummation, as each party supplied the common cause with what the other lacked.

Relations with the Partito Popolare proved more difficult. After the elections of 1919 the Popolari to some extent enjoyed the favour of the national parties as they represented a check to the more violent activities of the Socialists. Under the Cabinets which succeeded that of Nitti they exercised great influence, and while Bonomi was in power they were, as we have seen, the arbiters of the situation. In the meanwhile their extreme Left wing had tended to become more truculent and intolerant, and adopted a demagogic policy which differed little from that of the Socialists. This brought them into conflict with the Fascisti and the Nationalists, and their intemperance finally induced the Vatican to issue an order to the bishops forbidding the clergy to take an active part in politics. But under the Facta regime conflicts between the Fascisti and the Popolari became very frequent. When the new Government was formed the Partito Popolare did not definitely oppose it, both because its extremist elements were afraid of the consequences and because Mussolini's attitude towards the Church had won him the support of the Vatican and of the large section of Popolare voters who had joined the party chiefly from religious convictions. The Cabinet in fact comprised four Popolari, including one Minister (Cavazzoni). During the first few months of the Fascista regime there were no grounds for disagreement between the Government and the Popolari. One eminent ecclesiastic, Cardinal Vannutelli, made an address on February 21st while celebrating the marriage of Aldo Finzi, Under Secretary of State for the Interior, which, in spite of a somewhat attenuating explanation in the *Osservatore*

*romano*, seemed to imply the unmistakable favour of the Vatican towards the new regime. "In this work for the common safety," Cardinal Vannutelli declared, "of which the need was so greatly felt, it was the merit of Aldo Finzi to secure the confidence of the man who through his eminently statesmanlike qualities, his clear intellect, his unswerving energy, is destined to be its chief artificer, the man who is already acclaimed throughout Italy as the saviour of the country according to the glorious religious and civil traditions of the nation."<sup>1</sup> Also in the local administrations of many towns and provinces Popolari continued to participate in the National *blocchi*, notably in Turin.

But several of the leaders, including Don Sturzo, were not satisfied with this state of things, and being now, after the collapse of the Socialists, the only existing party of masses except the Fascisti, determined to try their strength with a view not of upsetting the Government, which they knew was impossible, but of making it feel that it was to some extent dependent on their favour. A congress of the party was convoked at Turin for April 13th, and three distinct tendencies appeared within its ranks in the course of the debates: the Right, in favour of unconditional collaboration with the Government; the Left, in favour of opposition; and the Centre, which advocated support, but with many conditions and reservations. Don Sturzo delivered a powerful speech in favour of the Centre tendency, the intonation of which was, however, distinctly hostile to the Government. The great majority of the delegates, representing 90,000 Popolari, overcome by the Sicilian priest's remarkable eloquence, voted his resolution, while that proposed by the Right group only secured 20,000. Mussolini was not the man to take this challenge lying down or to accept a compromise with the Partito Popolare. He at once summoned the four members of the party in the Cabinet to a meeting, which took place on the 17th; the interview was cordial, but the Premier demanded an explicit declaration of policy. The four Popolari offered

<sup>1</sup> *La Stampa*, February 22, 1923.

him their resignations, but he replied that he would not take a decision until after the meeting of the parliamentary group of the party fixed for the 20th. At this meeting the deputy Tovini proposed a resolution of full support for the Government and approval of its policy, whereby every member of the group was to undertake to base his conduct on this policy. But it was rejected, and another resolution was voted instead permitting members of the party to participate in the Government and thereby implicitly accepting its policy, especially as regards the spiritual values of the nation ; it stated that the Partito Popolare must support the Government in its exceptional difficulties, consider the problem of electoral reform, co-ordinating it with the supreme necessities of the country, and also confirm its confidence in the Government and its chief. Neither Tovini, Pestalozza, nor Martire of the Right wing, nor Miglioli of the Left, voted this resolution, but it was approved by seventy members out of the eighty present, including several members of the Left wing. Mussolini was not satisfied with it, and on the 24th he wrote to Signor Cavazzoni, Minister of Labour, noting that it had been voted by some of the most rabid Left elements. " I had asked that the situation be made clearer ; but I find before me instead a somewhat involved document which does not fundamentally modify the essentially anti-Fascista basis of the Turin Congress, as is evidenced by the Popolare deputies who took part in it." He therefore accepted the resignation of Signor Cavazzoni and the three Popolare Under Secretaries.

This episode did not definitely signify a break between the Government and the Popolari, and still less the Catholics as a whole. On the one hand we have the beginnings of a new Popolare group whole-heartedly favourable to the Government, styling itself the *Unione nazionale* and composed of the dissident Right wing of the Partito Popolare, while on the other Mussolini's pro-Catholic measures notably the institution of State examinations which place the pupils of private—mostly Church—schools on the same footing as those of the lay public schools, strengthened the

tendency of the Vatican to support the Government and indirectly discountenance the activities of the followers of Don Sturzo within the Partito Popolare. Previously, in October, 1922, some weeks before the Fascista revolution, the State Secretariat of the Holy See had issued a circular forbidding all priests having a cure of souls from taking part in politics. Now, on April 25th, Cardinal Gasparri, Secretary of State, issued a new circular to the bishops which went still further. "His Holiness," the document stated, "wishes that all those who in some way represent and measure the interests of religion should keep to the rules of the strictest prudence, avoiding even the appearance of an attitude in favour of political parties." This pronouncement is of notable importance, and according to a part of the Press is a confirmation of the old Liberal thesis that religion and its organization should not be used for party purposes.<sup>1</sup>

Signor Mussolini seized the opportunity offered by the resignation of the four Popolari to suppress their posts—the Ministry of Labour and the Under Secretaryships for Foreign Affairs, Justice, and Agriculture; the Ministry of Labour had only been created to please the demagogues and had never rendered any real service, while the Under Secretaryships had been gradually losing importance and were chiefly useful as extra appointments to satisfy the soaring ambitions of the younger politicians. The Prime Minister subsequently suppressed the Under Secretaryship for Fine Arts (in the Ministry of Education) and was preparing to deal similarly with others.

Another problem which the Government, or rather the Fascista party, had to face was that of its relations with Freemasonry. Freemasonry in Italy had originally been founded as an anti-Clerical organization, and while it still retained that character to some extent, it had become chiefly a mutual aid society of a somewhat disreputable nature, lending its support to such of its members who had deservedly got into trouble or who wished to advance more rapidly in their political, business, professional or adminis-

<sup>1</sup> *Giornale d'Italia*, May 4, 1923.

trative careers than their abilities or competence would have enabled them to do. Of late years it had largely lost credit and power, but it still exercised a certain influence. On April 13th the Fascista Grand Council decided that freemasonry was incompatible with Fascismo, as it implied in its adherents a discipline other than that of the party and of devotion to the national idea. Fascisti who were free-masons were therefore ordered to choose between freemasonry and Fascismo. The immense majority of Fascista freemasons (mostly "sleeping" freemasons) abandoned freemasonry.<sup>1</sup> A notable exception was General Capello, commander of the Second Army during the war, who quitted Fascismo and remained a freemason.

The Socialists and Communists were of course open enemies. But their power was destroyed, their numbers had dwindled (the *Unitari* Socialists, the most numerous group, only counted some 10,000 adherents), and torn by internal dissensions; above all they were not heroes, and when there was danger in the air they were apt to withdraw out of harm's way. Here and there a few individuals gave trouble, but they had ceased to be a danger. Collaborationist Socialist tendencies still existed, but they could no longer possibly penetrate peacefully into the meanders of the Government services under the ever-watchful eye of Mussolini and his adherents. An attempt was made to give Socialism a new lease of life by holding yet another congress at Milan on April 15th to 17th. A resolution proposed by Vella and Nenni, and opposed by Lazzari, Serrati and Maffi, was voted by the majority against fusion with the Communist party as had been ordered by the Third International, but the desire was expressed to collaborate with Moscow and "maintain the party on the basis of revolutionary Socialism, without compromise, without weakness, without equivocation; the party must make itself the centre of the movement of proletarian opposition to the bourgeois-Fascista dictatorship, an opposition which must not be occasional or momentary, but historic and final."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Popolo d'Italia*, February 14, 1923.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, April 18, 1923.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE CARRYING OUT OF THE PROGRAMME

WHILE the chief basis of the Fascista programme had been the re-establishment of the internal situation of the country, foreign affairs also played a large part in the aspirations of the party. The foreign policy of the preceding Governments had been almost as unsatisfactory as their internal policy, and Mussolini had always insisted that Italy could never come into her own until her relations with foreign Powers were conducted in a manner suitable for a great nation of 40,000,000. Some of his pronouncements in this field had not indeed erred on the side of excessive prudence, and several of the other Fascista leaders had gone even further than he had. Considerable anxiety was therefore felt when he came into power in several foreign countries, where the true meaning of the Fascista movement had not been fully understood. The foreign Press was apt to confuse D'Annunzio's policy with that of the Fascisti, and could indeed quote certain speeches and articles of Mussolini and other prominent Fascisti as implying uncompromising hostility to various foreign Powers. Only a few weeks before his advent to power Mussolini had published an article in the *Popolo d'Italia* (October 1) in which he asserted that Italy must follow an anti-British policy, and that it is an Italian interest to contribute to the demolition of the British Empire. Fascista writers have sometimes spoken of the annexation of Malta as coming within Italian aspirations, and often of the betrayal of Dalmatia and of the necessity for going back on that policy.

But in his first speech as Prime Minister Mussolini set forth, as we have seen, a programme of foreign policy at once dignified, wise, and free from any suggestion of adven-

ture, merely demanding of the Allies that Italy should be treated not as an inferior, but as an equal among equals. His undertaking to carry out the Rapallo and Santa Margherita agreements reassured the Yugoslavs, for although he still considered those conventions by no means perfect, he was determined to abide loyally by them the moment they were ratified by Parliament. Ratification took place soon afterwards, and Italy proceeded to carry out her part of the agreements by evacuating the third Dalmatian zone, while negotiations commenced for the final settlement of the Fiume problem. Mussolini is by no means the only statesman who on becoming Minister set aside his former pronouncements hostile to this or that foreign Power. The most celebrated instance of this was the repudiation by Gladstone of his violently anti-Austrian speeches delivered during the famous Midlothian election campaign. On other questions of foreign policy Mussolini also showed remarkable statesmanlike qualities, although his lack of experience in matters of detail put him at first at a certain disadvantage in dealing with foreign colleagues accustomed for years to handling international problems.

The main problem before the new Government, after the restoration of internal order, was finance. The extravagance of previous Cabinets, who had been ever ready to give way to the demands of the State employees, especially in the costly railway and postal services, Government interference in trade and industry, the absurdly expensive experiments in governmental economic activity, the intolerable pressure of taxation, which, while confiscatory in certain fields, left others almost untouched, had in past years resulted in enormous deficits. In 1920-1921 the deficit was over ten milliards, although reduced by the suppression of the bread subsidy to 4,300 milliards. In the estimates for 1922-1923, the deficit was calculated by Signor Peano, Treasury Minister in the Facta Cabinet, at 3,500 milliards. But his successor, Signor Paratore, estimated it in a speech in the Senate at four and a half milliards. For 1923-1924 the revenue was estimated at

17,750 milliards and the expenditure at 22,276, leaving a deficit of 4,526, but with the railway deficit added the total amounted to 5,542 milliards, and a further estimate brought it to 6,500 milliards. There were some signs of improvement in the increasing revenue produced by the taxes, but, on the other hand, the industrial and commercial crisis, unemployment, high wages, the unfavourable exchange, and the general disorganization of the country left the financial situation still critical. Professor Tangorra, the new Treasury Minister, said that the Government was determined to balance the Budget by conforming to three main guiding principles : (1) A policy of rigid economy, which was indispensable before any further sacrifices could be demanded of the taxpayers ; (2) a reorganization of the system of taxation and financial administration, with the object of placing them on a more equitable basis and preventing the evasion of taxation ; (3) the encouragement of every form of economic activity so that the country should emerge as soon as possible from the present economic crisis. The Government must, he added, avoid creating obstacles to production ; any other course would be fatal to the interests even of the working classes, whom the demagogues had so deeply injured by driving them to resistance against every measure likely to contribute to the financial restoration of the country and the increment of national savings.

In order to put these principles into practice the Government proceeded to issue a series of Royal Decrees, drastically cutting down expenses and suppressing useless offices. There was much discussion about the "legality" or "illegality" of these measures ; but as the eminent sociologist and economist Professor Pareto pointed out,<sup>1</sup> measures of this kind could not be carried out through the normal workings of parliamentary institutions, yet they were necessary for the safety of the country ; in any case the Governments preceding that of Mussolini had been equally guilty of "illegal" acts, which, however, instead of benefiting the country, brought it to the verge of disaster.

<sup>1</sup> *Gerarchia*, April, 1923.

Hence the really important point is whether the measures are good in themselves and likely to achieve the desired ends.

One of these measures was that extending direct taxation to all persons earning wages above a certain limit, even if they belonged to the class styled working-men, who under the reign of the demagogues, had been exempted, while employees and small professional men earning far less had to pay to the full limit. A first decree in this direction was announced on December 22, 1922, which taxed workmen employed by the State, the provinces, and the municipalities. The measure is to be extended to other categories. Another decree extended taxation to land cultivated directly by the owners, which hit both certain classes of large landlords and small peasant proprietors.

But it was in the field of bureaucratic reform that the Fascista Government was most active. Giolitti attempted some measures in this direction, but had been defeated by the resistance of vested interests, supported by parliamentary intrigue, from which trammels Mussolini was free. On December 20th Professor Tangorra resigned on account of ill-health, and died a few days later. The Prime Minister immediately entrusted Professor De Stefani, Finance Minister, with the Treasury as well, and thus merged the two ministries into one. Until 1877 there had been a single Ministry for Finance and Treasury, but in that year it was divided into two, the Finance Ministry dealing with the collection of revenue and the Treasury with loans and other financial operations and the supply of funds to the spending departments. The very next year a commission of eminent financiers had declared the measure to be a serious mistake. But although all experts, including Signor Luzzatti, who had been Treasury Minister five times, were agreed that the coexistence of the two ministries was injurious and excluded the possibility of establishing a real financial policy, no Government had been strong enough to reunite them, as it would have involved the suppression of one portfolio and a reduction of staff. Mussolini with a stroke of the pen did the deed. The two Under Secretaries remained,

but when some months later Signor De Vecchi, the Under Secretary for the Treasury, resigned, his post was suppressed. The Ministry for the Liberated Territories and Under Secretaryship for Fine Arts in the Ministry of Education were also suppressed, and after the resignation of the four Popolare members of the Government in April, the Ministry of Labour and the Under Secretaryships for Justice, Agriculture, and Foreign Affairs were, as we have already seen, suppressed. On December 29th, the Cabinet Council voted the suppression of the twenty-one committees and councils attached to the Ministry of Agriculture, which encumbered its work uselessly and involved considerable expense, as all the three hundred odd members received special allowances and bonuses, which were often earned by merely putting in an occasional appearance for five minutes at a meeting.<sup>1</sup>

An important decree for the general reduction of the bureaucracy was issued on January 23rd, enabling the Government to place on the retired list all officials who (a) prove unable to carry on their work through ill-health, incapacity, or inadequate output, (b) who have forty years' service, or (c) who have reached the age of sixty-five with twenty years' service. This measure is to be carried out until the limits of staff-reduction contemplated for the various departments is attained. If by the time all the civil servants included in the above-mentioned categories are pensioned off, that limit shall not have been attained the Government will proceed to add to the numbers to be placed on the retired list until it is. Those who have not been in the service for a sufficient number of years to be entitled to a pension will receive an indemnity proportionate to the length of their service. Further provisions are to be issued for revising all appointments made since May, 1915, with a view to getting rid of a large part of the officials selected to fill the vacancies caused by the general mobilization or put in charge of the innumerable posts created in connexion with the war, many of the latter having no longer a *raison d'être*, although still in being with expensive staffs. These

<sup>1</sup> *Tribuna*, December 31, 1922.

measures are not applicable to railwaymen or magistrates, who are dealt with by other decrees. All Government departments and ministries were instructed to present plans for the reduction of expenditure. The Ministry of the Interior began with the suppression of the Guardia Regia. This force had been created by Nitti in 1919 with a view to liberating the Army from police duties, in itself a wise measure. But the organization and discipline of the force left a good deal to be desired, and bore traces of its Nittian origin and of the political tendencies which characterized Nitti's regime. The officers were mostly recruited from the regular army and the Carabinieri, and the men partly from those institutions, partly from the disbanded Guardie di Pubblica Sicurezza, while some were new recruits. Many of the officers and men were excellent, and not a few fell victims to their duty at the hands of Communist assassins ; but while the officers who joined the new force were all promoted one or even two or three grades, those who were thus selected for the advantages offered by the transfer were not always the best, reasons of a political or personal nature often inspiring the choice. The men were often unfitted for their duties, and occasionally their conduct was severely criticized, as in the case of the demonstration of Dalmatians and Fiumani in Rome, in May, 1920 (see p. 87). Also the Guardia Regia proved enormously expensive and was equipped in a most lavish and extravagant manner at a time when economy was imperative. Officers and men were very highly paid and lavishly equipped—a single one of the mounted squadrons cost almost as much as a whole regiment of cavalry. Nor did the Guardia Regia by any means wholly liberate the Army from police duties, as whenever strikes or riots occurred the troops had to be called out in large numbers as well.

The new Government therefore decided to abolish the Guardia Regia early in the year. It was disbanded with astonishing speed ; the officers who had been drawn from the Army and the men who still had military duties were re-drafted into the Army, the best of the remainder were enrolled in the Carabinieri, and the rest dismissed. The

measure created some discontent among the men, and at Turin, Naples, Spezia, and a few other places there were demonstrations, but not of a really serious nature ; those who took part in them were immediately arrested, court martialled, and punished although not very severely. In less than a week the whole force of 41,000 men was suppressed.<sup>1</sup> The Prime Minister subsequently ordered an inquiry into the administration of the Guardia Regia, which he entrusted to General Dallolio. It appears that a number of serious irregularities have come to light, in which not only some of the officers are implicated, but also certain high officials closely connected with the policy of Nitti and Giolitti. In order to replace the disbanded Guardia Regia without great expenditure and avoiding the employment of troops for the maintenance of order, Mussolini conceived the idea of creating a force of volunteer militia composed of Fascisti to assist the police when necessary. This subject will be dealt with subsequently.

In other departments the number of officials and posts was ruthlessly cut down. The united Finance and Treasury Ministry effected an economy of 251,000,000 on the general services, while the suppression of prizes for the cultivation of tobacco resulted in a further economy of over 4,000,000. On the other hand, foreign capital invested in Italy was exempted from taxation for a period of years.<sup>2</sup> But the most important reforms, which were both of an economic and social-political nature, were those in the railways and the postal and telegraph services.

Under the management of Signor Riccardo Bianchi the State railway service had improved and expenditure was covered by revenue. But his activity and severity procured him many enemies, and at the time of the earthquake in the Marsica (January, 1915) he was so bitterly attacked and so inadequately supported by the Government that he resigned. Under his successor, Signor De Cornè, politics came to play an ever larger part in railway affairs, with

<sup>1</sup> See Signor Acerbo's speech at Teramo on February 5, 1923 (*Popolo d'Italia*, February 6).

<sup>2</sup> *Corriere della Sera*, December 16, 1922.

disastrous results. When Signor Crova succeeded things went from bad to worse, and under the Nitti regime the extreme limits of inefficiency, extravagance, and indiscipline were reached. The total railway system of Italy, which had been 6,000 kilometres in 1870, had grown to 19,144 in December, 1919, to which another 1,300 kilometres must be added for the new provinces. Before the war there were 6,000 locomotives, 12,000 passenger coaches, and 112,000 goods vans and trucks. At the moment of the Armistice the total rolling stock had slightly increased, but a great deal of it had been worn out during the war and would have been scrapped but for the difficulty of obtaining new material and its high cost. On June 30, 1919, 860 locomotives and 17,000 cars of all sorts were in construction, but the necessary repairs of the old ones, which were in bad condition, were proceeding very slowly. Before the war there were 170,000 railwaymen, a figure which, considering the total mileage of the system and the mountainous nature of the country, was not excessive. During the war a considerable number of railwaymen had to leave their work to join the colours, and were temporarily replaced by other men who for different reasons were exempt from military duties. But when, after the war, those railwaymen who had served in the Army and had not been killed or disabled returned to their jobs, the temporary employees (known as *avventizi*) were not dismissed ; in fact, with the wave of demagogism, then at its flood-tide, the *avventizi* were regarded with especial favour and their numbers continued to increase, while the men who had fought in the war were looked on askance. This fact, the introduction of the eight hours' day (which in many cases meant eight hours on duty but only seven, six, or even less of actual work) and the decreased efficiency and work-shyness of many of the railwaymen, resulted in a considerable increase in the personnel, although the traffic was less than before the war. The State railways alone, which on June 30, 1914, employed 154,985 men, had on June 30, 1921, 236,000 on their pay rolls, which had increased to 241,000 by August of the same year. Since then some reductions

had been effected, and by June 30, 1922, the total had fallen to 229,000.

The financial results were as follows : In 1913 the railways had transported 130,000,000 passengers and 47,000,000 tons of goods, and the revenue was 655,000,000 lire, a sum inferior by 45,000,000 to that necessary to cover expenditure and pay 3½ per cent interest on the capital. During and after the war expenditure increased enormously, owing to the high price of coal and the huge rise in wages (158 per cent for the higher officials and 643 per cent for the lowest grades in 1920–1921 as compared with 1913–1914). The average rate of pay had risen from 1,947 on June 30, 1914, to nearly 11,000 in 1921. The total cost for wages and salaries which was 2,009,800,000 in 1920–1921, rose to 2,275,700,000 in 1921–1922, although the numbers of the staff had slightly declined. The traffic produced 2,695,400,000 in 1920–1921, and 2,792,800,000 in 1921–1922. The cost of coal diminished from 417·86 lire per ton in 1920–1921 to 243·44 in 1921–1922. Among the causes of the deficit the number of railway thefts must be counted. In 1913–1914 the administration had to pay 1,520,000 lire as compensation for goods lost or stolen ; in 1919–1920 the figure had risen to 26,400,000, in 1920–1921 to 78,400,000, in 1921–1922 to 93,845,000 (of which 50,835,000 were for thefts alone).<sup>1</sup> Another cause was the enormous number of free passes or tickets at reduced rates issued ;<sup>2</sup> the former in 1922 were no less than 21,000, including 546 issued to delegates of the *Sindacato ferrovieri*, an unblushingly revolutionary organization, who availed themselves of this privilege to conduct a Bolshevik propaganda and organize strikes, while they were exempted from all other duties and even received special allowances. The 700 members of the so-called "railway parliament," an advisory body composed of railwaymen whose chief activities were political, also had free passes. Every railwayman had three free tickets for himself and his

<sup>1</sup> *Tribuna*, December 19, 1922, and January 12, 1923 ; *Corriere della Sera*, December 23, 1923.

<sup>2</sup> Pantaleoni, "Bolshevism Italiano," p. xxxv.

family per annum, and many of the men openly trafficked in them. Finally there was the scandal of malingering. In 1913 the average number of days of sick leave per man was 13·11 per annum ; in 1920 it was 18·6. As the general health of the population had improved during the interval the explanation can only be found in the increase of fictitious indispositions, which the railway doctors, from fear or a desire to curry favour with the extremists, condoned. There had been some improvement during 1922, and the new general manager, Signor Alzona, showed excellent qualities as an administrator. But the consequence of the Nitti regime, during which the railwaymen were practically masters of the railways, could not be quickly eliminated. The situation was still serious, especially from an economic point of view, and called for drastic remedies.

The new Government at once undertook the cleansing of the railways, which represented the most formidable item in the Budget deficit of the State. The Prime Minister declared his intention of eventually handing over the railways to private enterprise, as the State administration had not been a success ; but as it would have been impossible to find any company or group of companies ready to take them over in their present conditions, the Government must itself first apply the axe of economy and introduce a system of rigid discipline. For this reason Mussolini appointed a High Commissioner of Railways, in the person of Dr. Edoardo Torre, an energetic Fascista leader and deputy for Alessandria, with full powers to deal with and suppress all abuses (December 19, 1922). The choice was a good one, as far as concerns the re-establishment of discipline, but the High Commissioner and Signor Alzona did not always see eye to eye, and certain unfortunate disagreements between them appear to have arisen, with the result that the latter resigned and a successor has not been appointed. But on the whole the results have been very satisfactory. Torre at once began by making reductions in the staff, and on May 3rd it was semi-officially announced that from October 1, 1922 to April 30, 1923, 17,232 men had been dismissed, of whom about 13,000 since January

irst, and that another 300,000 would be dismissed within the year. Wages are to be reduced, the average of 10,000 per annum being regarded as a fair figure in present conditions and in view of the average wages in private industry. The number of free passes and tickets at reduced rates has been greatly diminished, and many other minor abuses done away with. The eight hours' day is maintained, but it is now a real eight hours' day of effective work. To cope with the railway thefts, which were largely due to railwaymen as principals or accomplices, Signor Torre organized a railway police force composed of Fascisti railwaymen. Although the system has not been long introduced, it has already given good results and thefts have been reduced to a minimum; Signor Torre hopes to eliminate them entirely. A number of thieves have been caught *in flagrante* and some of them shot by the Fascisti while engaged in these operations. The railway police also enforce discipline among the staff, and insist on the rigid application of the regulations. A similar force has been created to deal with the thefts in the Port of Genoa, with equally satisfactory results. Bonuses for economy in coal consumption, which were suppressed by Nitti in 1920, or rather replaced by increases of pay for the locomotive staff independently of the economies effected, with a consequent heavy increase in the coal bill, have been reintroduced. Malingering has greatly diminished, as the men know that those who prove guilty of this offence are severely punished. The reduction of the staff has secured advantages other than economy: the ringleaders and the more active revolutionary agitators are being gradually eliminated. Recently fifty-two higher railway officials have been placed on the retired list; they had all reached the age limit, and several of them had long been past their work and did little more than draw their pay, but some of them were really useful men, and their enforced retirement has been criticized in certain quarters as likely to affect the efficiency of the service, in which their experience and competence were still valuable. Although the full benefits of this reorganization cannot of course yet be felt, the

improvement in the service is already considerable and evident. The trains are punctual, the coaches clean, some little-used trains have been suppressed, the staff is efficient and courteous. Signor Torre expected to reduce the deficit to 400,000,000 in the present financial year and to eliminate it altogether by 1925-1926.

The handing over of the system to one or more private companies has given rise to lively discussions. A scheme of this kind was presented and actually approved of by the Minister of Public Works concerning a group of lines centring round Cremona; but the proposal encountered such considerable opposition that the Prime Minister decided to re-examine it, and in the meanwhile held up the concession. There appear to be in Fascista circles two conflicting views as to the advisability of handing over the railways to private enterprise, one being opposed to such a policy owing to the impossibility of avoiding the establishment of a railway monopoly on account of the geographical conformation of Italy and the present state of development of the railway system, while the other is in favour of denationalization at any price.

The postal, telegraph, and telephone services had never quite reached the pitch of disorganization attained by the railways, although insubordination and revolutionary activity were rife among a considerable part of the employees, enhanced by the submissive attitude of the Government to nearly all their demands. Losses of letters were frequent, thefts of parcels increased, the telegraph service was irregular and that of the telephones impossible. At the same time the department had become extremely costly, and its annual deficit ran into hundreds of millions. The new Postmaster-General, Giovanni Colonna, Duke of Cesaro', a Sicilian deputy, nephew of the late Baron Sonnino, and a man of little administrative experience but great energy and remarkable intelligence, set to work systematically to improve the services and re-establish discipline. Here, too, the Government intended to hand over several branches of the work to private enterprise, particularly the telephones, part of which were indeed already run by private

firms with considerable success, although the employees are as well paid as in the Government system and the shareholders receive dividends. In fact, as soon as the Government announced its intention of handing over the telephones to private enterprise it received numerous tenders, which proves that in the opinion of business experts the service can be made to pay its way.

Another demagogic institution which the Government is doing away with is the system of rent restriction. Its origins were legitimate. During the war the Government was determined to prevent the raising of rents and the eviction of the families of men serving in the Army, and a partial system of rent restriction was introduced. While the war lasted there was no general appreciable increase of rents, but as soon as the Armistice was signed they began to rise rapidly owing to a variety of causes common to other countries, including, of course, the general increase in the cost of living and the fact that during the war building operations had been practically suspended. The situation was particularly difficult in Rome on account of the immense increase in the number of civil servants, in certain growing business centres such as Milan, and in Venice, where for topographical reasons expansion is almost impossible. In order to limit the increase of rent Nitti issued a Royal Decree on January 4, 1920, and another on April 18, 1920, imposing a series of restrictions on all rents for which the contracts were anterior to December 31, 1919. Rents could henceforth only be raised to a very limited extent, according to a sliding scale proportionate to the amount paid, and it became practically impossible to evict tenants for any reason except non-payment of rent. The result was that persons who had invested their savings in house property, hitherto regarded as the safest and most prudent form of investment, found that, while their general expenses had risen by 400 and 500 per cent of the pre-war rate and taxes were raised to an even higher proportion, they could only increase the rents of their tenants by infinitesimal percentages; it was, in fact, a partial confiscation of house property, and many small owners were

almost ruined. Nitti also created the *Commissari degli Alloggi* in the chief towns, a new form of bureaucracy to enforce the rent restriction decrees and protect tenants against eviction ; both before these commissioners and before the ordinary courts, acting under instructions from the Government, it was always the tenant who was favoured and never the landlord, independently of the merits of each case. The results of this policy were the following. Large numbers of families whose rent contracts were prior to 1920 were only paying from 10 per cent to 20 per cent more than they paid before the war, and whenever they had one or two rooms to spare they sublet them for a rent superior to what they were paying for the whole apartment. Landlords refused to make repairs as house property no longer paid, and numbers of houses were thus allowed to fall into disrepair. On the other hand, when through the death or departure of a tenant an apartment did become vacant, the rent demanded was far in excess of what it would have been in a regime of freedom. Thus one part of the population was paying too little for rent and another too much. At the same time, in spite of the great demand for houses, no new ones were built ; no capitalist would be so mad as to invest a penny in house property as long as the restrictions were in force. The only exceptions were the various co-operative societies among civil servants, municipal employees, railwaymen, etc., which, with the heavy subsidies granted to them by the State, continued to build houses for their own members. But in many cases the co-operators had no intention of inhabiting these new apartments, which they preferred to sublet to other tenants at a large profit, while they themselves continued to live in their old apartments, for which they were paying the pre-1920 rent plus the 10 per cent to 20 per cent allowed by the law ; such transactions were forbidden, but co-operators, especially if of Socialist sentiments, were above the law. Another of the activities of the Commissari degli Alloggi was to try to force persons occupying large apartments or having more than one apartment in different towns to let part of the accommodation to persons in search of lodging.

But this action was entirely *ultra vires*, and merely served to exasperate the public and frighten capital still further away from investing in house property, which was gradually ceasing to be property at all.

While Nitti was the author of this system, none of his successors had the courage to do away with it or even to attenuate it, save to the extent of authorizing a small percentage of increase in the rents. Although the restrictions were supposed to be of a purely temporary nature to tide over the period immediately following the war, they were prorogued from year to year and no relief was in sight. It was almost impossible for new-comers and the new families which were growing up from year to year to find houses at all, and not a few marriages were held up on account of this impossibility. Every one was discontented, except the rent profiteers, who made large incomes out of subletting.

The new Government on January 7, 1923, issued a decree, abolished the Commissari degli Alloggi at once, and did away with these restrictions as from July 1, 1923, with certain qualifications in favour of minor Government officials, pensioners, and other persons of small means, for whom a fair rent was to be fixed by joint committees of landlords and tenants, presided over by a magistrate, these limitations to extend to 1926. There was a good deal of excitement at first among the poorer tenants and also among those who had succeeded in exploiting the restrictive measures for their own profit, while many landlords wished to raise rents to the highest possible figures in order to recoup themselves for the semi-confiscation of the past years. But Mussolini warned the latter not to misuse their restored freedom from restrictions lest they be deprived of it once more, and the tenants' associations to abstain from factious agitation; a demonstration announced to take place in Rome, which had been organized by a Nittian, a Socialist, and a Communist deputy, was prohibited. But in nearly all the chief towns agreements were arrived at between landlords and tenants on the basis of a progressive increase of rent for modest dwellings, to remain in force

until after 1926, while for large and luxurious flats and houses no limitation was imposed.

Another step on the road to liberating the State from the millstone of "economic" enterprises was the partial suppression of the Government monopoly of life insurance. Inspired by Nitti, while Minister of Agriculture, Industry, and Trade, in 1912, this measure had deprived all private companies of the right to do business in the field of life insurance, which was reserved for the newly created *Istituto nazionale delle Assicurazioni*. This organization proved less cumbersome and inefficient than other State enterprises, and was on the whole well and honestly managed. But it was unable to develop business to the same extent as a number of competing private concerns would have done, and life insurance in Italy thus failed to assume the proportions which it did in other countries. When Trieste was annexed to Italy the Government was faced with the difficulty of settling the two great insurance companies which had their head-quarters in that city. To have put them out of business would have been very hard on Trieste, which was already suffering from the general trade crisis in Central Europe, and they were therefore allowed to carry on business side by side with the National Insurance Institute. The new Government had at first intended to abolish the latter altogether, and entrust the life insurance business entirely to private enterprise. But as the National Institute was a source of revenue it eventually decided to maintain it in existence in competition with other companies, but with the privilege that the latter must hand over to it 40 per cent of their life insurance business. This is probably a temporary measure, and in time the whole of this business will be entrusted to the private companies.

Italy inherited a number of judicial organizations from the former Italian States, and although when the united kingdom was constituted they were welded into a single system applying one common law, a larger number of law courts was left than was necessary for the legal business of the country. The lawyers were of course favourable to the existence of numerous law courts, as they were not only

convenient to themselves, but also tended to encourage litigation. But no Minister had had the courage to cut down this plethoric organization, because every court was a centre of local interests and the deputies, most of whom were themselves lawyers, felt obliged to oppose any proposal for reduction within their respective constituencies. The organization comprised 4 courts of cassation, 20 courts of appeal, with four detached sections, 162 tribunals, and 1,550 *preture* or magistrates' courts. Not only was the system very expensive, but it involved the existence of large numbers of courts with practically no business, and a number of trained judges, often men of high attainments, were left in the depressing atmosphere of small towns with very small salaries and hardly any thing to do. The result was a gradual decline in the class of men attracted to the judicial career, and at the competitive examinations for the service it often happened that the number of candidates who passed was inferior to that of the vacancies to be filled. Various Ministers had attempted to introduce reforms, but they invariably found themselves up against insuperable resistance in Parliament and the country, and the proposal to abolish a single pretura was capable of provoking a local revolt; consequently, the Government preferred to follow the line of least resistance, and let things drift rather than face the difficulty. Signor Mussolini was not going to imitate the example of his predecessors, and on March 24th, the Cabinet Council, on the proposal of Signor Oviglio, Minister of Justice, decided the suppression of 3 of the 4 courts of cassation, 4 courts of appeal, 57 tribunals, and 550 *preture*. Provision was made for pensioning off magistrates who had reached the age limit or were no longer capable of fulfilling their duties, while others were to be gradually absorbed by the remaining courts and judicial offices, and of course no new appointments were made.

One of the most characteristic innovations of the Fascista Government was the creation of the "National Volunteer Militia." When the Fascisti came into power Signor Mussolini was faced with the problem of demobilizing the armed Fascista squadre. These irregular military organiza-

tions had been created to save the nation from the revolutionary activities of the Socialists and Communists, who, as we have seen, had cowed a large part of the people and even the Government into submission to their terrorism. To join a Fascio at that time involved very serious risks, as the Red gangs were everywhere lying in wait to murder every isolated Fascista they encountered. Thus the squadre at first only recruited the most fearless youths, many of whom—about 2,000 in all—fell victims to the assassins' knife or revolver. But every day their numbers grew until they ended by completely defeating the Reds, whose organizations crumbled away. During the October days the squadre numbered some 300,000 men, well armed and admirably disciplined on military lines, most of them having served in the war. Their existence was, however, incompatible with that of a Government based on Fascista principles, the chief of which was the re-establishment of law and order, while all the regular military and police authority was now at the disposal of the new Government for the carrying out of those principles. At the same time there still existed anti-national forces, which, although defeated and crushed, might in moments of crisis raise their heads once more and become dangerous. Consequently, Mussolini deemed it necessary to maintain some form of Fascista organization of a military character to assist the regular authorities in the maintenance of order, and at the same time to liberate the troops as far as possible from police duties. The Guardia Regia having been abolished, he decided to strengthen the Carabinieri by means of a volunteer police force brought under State discipline. He thus conceived the idea of creating a corps composed of Fascista elements on whom the Fascista Government could absolutely rely. At a Cabinet Council on December 28th, it was decided to disband the existing Fascista squadre, D'Annunzio's legionaries, the Nationalist squadre, the Arditi, and some other bodies of local importance. D'Annunzio's followers were the first to go, as being the least disciplined; the excellent Nationalist organization *Sempre Pronti* went next, and finally the Black Shirts.

But a Royal Decree of January 15, 1923, instituted the "Volunteer Militia for National Safety," to be recruited from among the Fascisti whose character and qualities are vouched for by the Prime Minister and the Fascista authorities, to whom he delegates his powers. The force "is at the service of God and the Fatherland and under the orders of the head of the Government." Its duty is to assist the armed police forces and the Army "in maintaining internal public order, and to prepare the citizens for the defence of Italian interests in the world." Save for a small number of officers and men on permanent duty for training purposes, the members of the force are unpaid and receive no allowances except when serving in communes outside their own places of residence. In the case of a general or partial mobilization the Volunteer Militia is automatically absorbed into the regular Army and the Navy.<sup>1</sup> The character of the force is indicated in the resolution voted by the Fascista Grand Council on January 14, 1923,<sup>2</sup> stating that it is essentially Fascista, that its object is to "safeguard the inevitable and inexorable development of the October revolution," and that its inner character must be inspired by "a discipline attaining the direst renunciation and the most ascetic abnegation."

The Fascista volunteers are only called out when needed to stiffen the police in the maintenance of order or on the occasion of reviews, public ceremonies, etc. They made their first appearance at the opening of Parliament, in Rome, in November, 1922, forming the cordons.

This institution was criticized in certain orthodox Liberal circles, as involving the creation of a force of too partisan a nature, which might develop into a Pærtorian guard, the more so as its members were to be recruited from among the Fascisti alone. Although as a matter of fact non-Fascisti are not absolutely excluded from the force, all candidates had to be approved by the Fascista authorities. The *Corriere della Sera* (December 30, 1923) asked itself whether the new militia would be essentially national, as

<sup>1</sup> *Popolo d'Italia*, January 16, 1923.

<sup>2</sup> *Corriere della Sera*, January 14, 1923.

its name implied, or continue to regard itself as exclusively Fascista. If it is to be "at the orders of the Government," what will happen if Mussolini were to resign or be out-voted? Would the force obey the new Prime Minister, whoever he was, or the old? What would happen if certain elements of discord were to penetrate into the militia? Are there not too many chiefs among the Fascisti, and are not some sections of the party too much subject to the influence of local conditions? To these doubts the *Corriere* itself replies that possibly the best guarantee that they will not be realized lies in the obscure but tenacious Italian instinct for straightening things out and avoiding catastrophic errors, and expressed the hope that the Fascista militia will soon be reabsorbed into the normal discipline of the country.

Mussolini was probably inspired in creating the Volunteer Militia by the idea that if the State is to be protected against any renewed attempt at revolution by the Reds public opinion must be enrolled on its side, and that the Fascisti represent the most reliable elements of the nation on which the Government can really count; the action of a Fascista force, placed under State discipline and under the orders of the State authorities, will be more supple than that of the regular forces and can do things which the latter could not. At the same time it represents a transition period from the irregular Fascista squadre to the normal condition in which force is wholly in the hands of the Army and the police. We should bear in mind that for several decades the properly constituted authorities had not had the country fully in hand, partly on account of the exuberant nature of the people and their traditional suspicion of all authority, and partly on account of the use to which certain unscrupulous Ministers had put those authorities, especially during the successive Giolitti regimes, for electioneering purposes, but still more owing to the general relaxation of State discipline, which reached its acutest form in the period following the Armistice. It was the reaction of public opinion, chiefly represented by Fascismo, which had made up for these deficiencies, and Mussolini, who had set

himself to restore the authority of the State, felt that he must provide absolute security for the new regime during its early development. Of course the necessity for such security must not be regarded in itself as a benefit, any more than a revolution, however salutary and necessary, is in itself a good thing, and it is to be hoped that the necessity for the new militia will eventually disappear. The uniform of the *Milizia Volontaria* is similar to that of the Army, but with an open tunic and black shirt. The grades correspond to those of the Army, but with different names, and the members of the force are not regarded as belonging to the Army (except, as we have seen, in time of mobilization), they do not wear the traditional *stellette* (five-pointed star), and its officers are not entitled to the salute from inferiors belonging to the Army. Already the men have rendered useful services on many occasions, especially for the repression of crime and for public assistance in accidents, thereby earning considerable popularity for themselves. In September, 1923, a detachment of the Militia was sent to Libya, when it distinguished itself in action. Quite recently the Government has given proof of energy in applying disciplinary punishments to members of the force who had taken part in the internal quarrels of certain sections of the Fascista party and challenged each other to duels. The commander-in-chief is Italo Balbo, a young war veteran of great courage and organizing ability. But the force is under the orders of General de Bono, who is also, as we have mentioned, the Director-General of Public Safety. A scheme is now being prepared for determining the relations between the Militia and the regular Army.

I need not enter into the reforms adopted by the new Government in the Army and Navy, which are of a more general character and such as other Governments inspired by the same desire to provide for the security of the country might have introduced. The total strength had been reduced by Nitti to the dangerously low figure of 175,000, which in reality was even less; while such a large proportion of the men were told off on guard duties, police services,

office work, etc., that it was impossible to bring a single battalion up to strength without picking men from half a dozen regiments. The period of military service, reduced to eight months, proved far too short, and other reforms introduced threatened to disorganize the whole Army. The appointment of General Diaz as Minister of War was a guarantee that organic reforms of an efficient nature would now be adopted. In May, 1924, General Diaz was forced to resign owing to ill-health, and has been succeeded by General Di Giorgio, one of the most gallant and intellectual officers in the Army. He commanded the famous XXVII Corps in the war. The peace strength was brought back to the pre-war figure of 275,000 (less than one-third of the French Army and not superior to the armies of some of the new States created after the war whose populations are far inferior to those of Italy), and the period of training raised to eighteen months ; the war Budget was contained within the limits of the pre-war figures, taking the depreciation of the currency into account. The Navy is to be maintained at its present standard, by commencing at once to build light cruisers, torpedo craft, submarines, etc., which will gradually replace existing ships when they become obsolete ; the construction of capital ships is suspended until 1927 as a result of the Washington agreement.

## CHAPTER XIII

### FASCISMO AND LABOUR

WHEN Fascismo first came into prominence, it was often regarded, owing to its vigorous campaign against the Red extremists, as the enemy of labour and the ally of reactionary capitalism. This was the shibboleth of the Italian Socialists of all shades, although the majority of them knew that it did not correspond to the truth, and it was trumpeted abroad and generally believed in foreign countries, even in many circles that were not Socialist. As a matter of fact in the early days of the movement Fascismo had no definite labour policy as it did not deal with labour problems. It merely fought against the revolutionary activities of the Communists and Socialists. But with the great increase of its numbers and the adherence of large masses of working-men, the organization of labour on a basis compatible with the patriotic principles of Fascismo became one of the chief activities of the party and eventually of the Government.

At the end of 1922 it was estimated that not less than 1,000,000 working men and agricultural labourers had gone over to the Fascista organizations; whole unions turned Fascista with all their adherents. The basis of the Fascista syndicalist movement, of which Edmondo Rossoni and Guido Pighetti are the chief organizers, is very different from that of the various pre-existing labour unions in Italy and elsewhere, inasmuch as its main principles are that labour must be patriotic and that class warfare must, as far as possible, be eliminated. The older labour movements of a Socialist tendency were all essentially international, and aimed, at least in theory, at uniting the "proletariat" of the whole world against capital and the capitalist Governments. In practice this theory has not always been lived

up to ; Marx and his party supported Prussia's war of conquest against France in 1870, and the German Socialists in 1914 supported German Imperialism in the world war. But the Italian Socialists had always taken the internationalist creed *au pied de la lettre*, and for years had conducted an active propaganda against every form of patriotism, trying to instil into the working masses a veritable hatred of their own country. This tendency, which had been in abeyance during the war, became more marked after the Armistice, as the Socialist party, with which the General Confederation of Labour and other labour unions were allied, and still more the new Communist party, took their orders from Russia and made the sickle and hammer their symbol.

The Fascista unions, as we have seen, were essentially patriotic and took the tricolour as their emblem, eschewing all contact with labour in foreign countries. Their principle that class warfare must be eliminated was the result of their conviction that the interests of the labouring classes were closely bound up with those of the nation as a whole, and that the general prosperity of the latter was dependent on the co-operation of all classes, whose aim should be the increase, improvement, and better organization of production. Capitalists, large and small, managers and experts, engineers, workmen, and peasants, are all necessary parts of the great productive machine, whether in agriculture, industry, or commerce. Class warfare, which was the basis of the policy of the Socialist and later of the Popolare unions, must therefore be avoided or at least rendered less bitter, and the demands of labour examined on their own merits and in view of the economic possibilities of the industry affected, by some organization on which both parties in the dispute and the community as a whole should be represented. As the interests of the nation are the prime consideration, the Fascisti aim at improving as well as increasing production, making the workman more skilful and more attached to his work, and also at moralizing him and making him a better citizen. At the same time employers of labour, in return for the advantage of securing

better workers, must grant them the best possible conditions compatible with the prosperity of the industry.

The Socialists and demagogues had idealized the men who worked with their hands to a preposterous degree, and professed to regard experts and managers as tools of the capitalists and as useless individuals. The whole Socialist movement had become more and more hostile to the educated classes, especially since the advent of the Soviets in Russia, who systematically wiped out the *intelligentsia*. The Fascista movement was, among other things, a reaction in favour of intellectualism and expert knowledge, and as soon as the Fascista labour organizations began to develop the hierarchy of values came to be honoured once more, according to the theory that each man should occupy the place for which he was best fitted, and rise to a higher one only if his merits rose, whereas the Socialists had wished to reduce all men to a dead level of mediocrity, whence it was only possible to rise by means of political activity. In fact, in Socialist circles the better and harder a man worked the more unpopular did he become, while the coveted appointments of paid secretary of a union or professional organizer and propagandist—the worst types of parasites produced by modern social conditions—were reserved for the favourites of the party leaders.

What the Fascisti are attempting to do is to create a network of organizations for every trade in every district of Italy. Each category—capitalists, experts and managers, employees and labourers—in each trade is to form a syndicate of its own, while the wider national corporations comprise all persons who derive their means of livelihood from a particular trade. The federation of corporations is the central organ. Local organs are set up in the various provinces, and also occasionally in smaller areas, according to convenience, local conditions, and the number of adherents.

The following programme of the National Fascista Corporation of Industry and Commerce may serve to give a general idea of the principles and objects of these organizations :—<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Il Lavoro d'Italia*, March 1, 1923.

1. The Government must be supported in its action in favour of the fusion of all classes in a mutual trust in the economic and industrial future of the country.
2. The Budget must be balanced.
3. All economic and industrial privileges, monopolies, and parasitism and all class policy must be combated.
4. The nation's savings must not be allowed to serve the purposes of small minorities of speculators.
5. Italian exports to Italian colonies and foreign countries must be developed by means of improved trade organization.
6. Tariffs must be revised.
7. A highly developed war industry must be encouraged in order to prevent speculation in war material.
8. Efficient industrial political action must be taken with a view to the adequate representation of the industrial class in the political, technical, and administrative organs of the State, the provinces, and the communes.
9. In the field of syndicalism, class co-operation between manufacturers, experts, and workmen must be encouraged, collective labour contracts provided with legal sanctions, obligatory arbitration introduced, and effective legislation for the protection of the rights of labour.
10. A well-disciplined collective industrial conscience must be created for the increase and development of Italian production.

This organization is as yet only in embryo, but if its principles are in many cases no more than aspirations, they serve to indicate its tendencies.

The Fascista agricultural corporation also undertook to create types of contracts for agricultural labour suited to the different conditions of different parts of Italy. A typical example is that of the *patto colonico*, or farmers' contract, for the province of Cremona, which is preceded by the following introduction :—

" This farmers' contract aims at establishing good feeling and cordial relations between the agriculturists (landlords and tenant farmers) and the labourers, for the good of all social classes, for the increment of production, and the

greatness of the country. It secures fair remuneration for the labourer, fixes the hours of work in such a manner as to assure the labourer of a period of rest adequate for his intellectual and moral improvement without hindering output ; it sets up and gives wide diffusion to all forms of social provident institutions, which the renovated fatherland assures for all its sons ; it endeavours to deal with unemployment in the best way ; it secures the rapid and equitable settlement of all conflicts arising between the parties concerned by means of municipal control offices on a patriotic basis ; by means of the provincial control office it aims at preparing and elaborating the agreements of the future. As the greatness and prosperity of Italy is indissolubly bound up with that of her sons, the two solemn patriotic festivals shall be recognized and exalted : April 21st, the birthday of Rome, and November 4th, the Festival of Victory.”<sup>1</sup>

This patriotic epilogue may seem strangely out of place in an agricultural contract, but we must remember that the agricultural labourers of Cremona had hitherto been almost entirely in the hands of the Socialist or Left-wing Popolari organizations, who preached rabid anti-patriotism and class hatred ; the new Fascista organizations make a point of dwelling on the essentially patriotic character of the movement which should inspire all its manifestations.

On November 10, 1922, a congress of the Fascista syndicalist corporations was held at Bologna, and a National Confederation of these bodies was constituted ; it was described as an association “uniting, under the symbol of the Italian flag, citizens of both sexes, all religious confessions, all social classes, and all categories of intellectual and manual labour.” In the programme of the association, as set forth by Racheli, syndicalism ceases to be an institution of the working classes alone, having become an institution of the whole people. “The Confederation affirms that the dynamic law of civil history does not consist of warfare between classes, i.e. between the various social functions, and still less of the collaboration of classes

<sup>1</sup> *Il Popolo d'Italia*, December 14, 1922.

which is a confusion of functions, but is constituted by the struggle of capacities, that is to say, the struggle of the groups of the lower classes who have acquired the capacity for fulfilling the functions of the upper classes who have lost the qualities corresponding to the functions of their own class."<sup>1</sup> In other words, the lower classes must struggle upwards and not pull the upper classes downwards ; only those groups or members of the latter who have ceased to be capable of fulfilling the rôle for which they were destined must give way to those groups or members of the lower classes who prove competent to take on such duties.

The same principles apply to agriculture as to industry ; the various categories constituting each syndicate are (a) landlords who rent out their estates, (b) landlords who farm them directly, (c) peasant proprietors, (d) tenant farmers who farm their holdings by means of hired labour, and (e) peasants and farmers who work their holdings themselves. Each category has its own organization, and all of them constitute the syndicate of a particular district, while the various syndicates together constitute the provincial federation of agricultural syndicates ; each provincial federation must adhere to the *Federazione italiana sindacati agricoli* (F.I.S.A.) and to the Fascista syndicate of that province. The provincial Fascista syndicate also comprises representatives of the various industrial and trade syndicates of the province.<sup>2</sup>

As agriculture is the mainstay of Italy's economic prosperity, it was natural that the new Government should devote particular attention to the subject. The conditions of agriculture vary considerably in different parts of Italy, and the output per hectare is much greater in some districts than in others, independently of the varying degrees of fertility of the soil. In many parts of Central and Southern Italy and the islands farming methods are very primitive, and even in parts of the North there is room for improvement. For many years the Government has been attempting to

<sup>1</sup> Ibid, November 12, 1922.

<sup>2</sup> *Il Lavoro d'Italia*, March 8, 1923.

introduce more scientific systems by means of the so-called itinerant professorships of agriculture, entrusted to experts, whose duty it is to travel over the districts assigned to them, instructing the farmers and peasants by means of lectures, advice and practical experiments. But there are only 300 of them for a farming population of 15,000,000, which means that each professorship has to provide for 50,000 persons. The Fascista Government is now instituting an organization called the "Militia of the Land," composed of active young men having some knowledge of farming, who, after having been properly instructed by these agricultural experts, are to act as their mandatories in order to reach as large a number as possible of the farmers of each district. This scheme too is as yet only in its infancy, but the idea is admirable, and promises well for the future. It is part of the general educational and intellectual improvement policy of the new Government.

Precise regulations are laid down for dealing with labour conflicts. The State is not expected to intervene save in the last resort. If both parties adhere to Fascismo the conflict must be referred to the arbitral organization constituted within each provincial federation. If one of the parties is not attached to Fascismo, a special arbitration board *ad hoc* with plenary powers must be set up. But if the party to the conflict which is non-Fascist refuses to accept this arbitration, the State must intervene, not directly, but by referring the matter to an arbiter appointed by itself. This is the theoretic principle, but it is not as yet always applied, as the syndicalist organizations are not fully perfected; such labour troubles as have occurred since the Fascisti came into power have been settled in various ways, and not always according to this or any other uniform set of principles.

The triumph of Fascismo had disorganized the Red unions; the G.C.L. had, as we have seen, broken off its alliance with the Socialist party, the railwaymen's syndicate declared itself a non-political body, and many other unions expressly dissociated themselves from the political activities of their former patrons. An attempt was made to promote

what was described as syndicalist unity, i.e. a fusion of all the existing labour unions, Fascista and non-Fascista, into a single big union. But the Fascisti ended by rejecting the scheme, which would have merely generated confusion ; they were determined to keep out of their syndicates and unions, as far as possible, all elements of doubtful antecedents, and only to admit those who were genuinely prepared to accept the whole of the Fascista creed.

The syndicalist activities of Fascismo have not yet achieved as much success as those of a political nature and administrative nature. If the anti-national attitude of the pre-existing labour organizations is being eliminated, or at least greatly attenuated, the organizations themselves continue to exist and still retain large numbers of adherents, although the moderate elements everywhere prevail even among the Socialists, and Communism has lost its hold over labour. Some of the leaders of the G.C.L., such as Baldesi and D'Aragona, recently approached the Prime Minister with a view to negotiating some sort of agreement with the Government and with Fascismo, and at the meeting of that organization in Milan July, 1923, the tendency in favour of such an understanding prevailed. There is also talk of creating a purely Labour party on the English model, which should be divorced from politics ; but as yet the idea has not materialized.

There is considerable division of opinion regarding this aspect of Fascismo, both among the Fascisti themselves and among persons belonging to other parties. Many manufacturers of Fascista sympathies refuse to join the syndicates because they consider their economic interests more closely identified with their own trade organizations and with the General Confederation of Industry, which comprise industrials of all political creeds, united for the promotion and protection of each particular industry and of industry in general. On the other hand, many workmen, as we have seen, continue to adhere to their old unions, especially to the better organized ones.

A more serious obstacle to the success of the movement is to be found in the personnel. The greater part of the

organizers, secretaries, and propagandists of the Fascista unions are ex-Socialists. Many of them are sincere in their conversion, and have rendered great services to the movement and to the country in general. But others went over to Fascismo simply because it was the winning party and have brought with them all their baggage of demagogic mentality, and are showing a tendency to put demagogic methods into practice. The mere presence of too large a number of professional labour organizers is in itself a danger to social peace, even if the individuals in question, or at least the majority of them, are sincere, because their career depends on the continuance of labour conflicts. If capital and labour are on good terms, or there exists really perfect machinery for eliminating labour conflicts, there is no room for the professional organizer, whose interest it is that labour and capital should disagree. It was of course inevitable that once Fascismo had become a party of masses, and whole unions turned Fascist, many of the old leaders should be found in the ranks of the new organizations. It must be admitted, moreover, that up to the present the danger has not materialized to any serious extent. The leaders of Fascista syndicalism have hitherto proved sincere in their determination to eliminate labour conflicts and to guide the masses along right lines. After four years of almost uninterrupted strikes and disorders, often accompanied by bloodshed, there is now peace in the field of labour, and hardly any troubles worthy of the name have occurred since the advent of Mussolini. The few conflicts which have arisen have been quickly and amicably settled, usually through the intervention of the Fascista leaders. Owing to the general economic crisis all over Europe the workmen have had to accept reductions of wages, and have done so without resistance, but, on the other hand, the absence of strikes has made work and wages more regular, so that on the whole the labourer is practically better off than when he was paid wages far above the real value of his output and beyond what his industry could afford but had to cease work, of his own free will or otherwise, owing to strikes. In reply to a question put to him

by a French traveller as to what he thought of Fascismo, an Italian railwayman declared : " I don't know whether it is good or bad, but we are certainly better off now than we were before." On the other hand, it must be borne in mind that the economic crisis in itself has attenuated labour conflicts, as the workman has been made to understand by experience that during hard times the choice lies between reduced wages and unemployment. The more serious test will come when the economic situation really improves.

The first merit of the Fascista syndicalist idea is that it aims at inculcating into the minds both of capitalists and workers the notion that their interests are common and that no one class can prosper unless the whole nation is prosperous. The other is its earnest attempt to do away with the hateful doctrine of class war and to rehabilitate capital and expert knowledge. The Government has always strongly supported the legitimate claims both of capital and of the working classes. In his speech of March 18, 1923, at the inauguration of the Congress of the International Chamber of Commerce in Rome, Signor Mussolini declared : " I do not believe that that sum of forces which in industry, in trade, in banking, in transport is generically described as capitalism, is on the eve of disappearing, as the doctrines of the Socialist extremists have so long claimed." Italy of all countries is the least suited for a war on capitalism, capital being the very element in which she is poorest ; she should, on the contrary, do everything to render capital secure and to attract it from abroad, whereas past Governments had lent themselves to a policy of relentless hostility to every form of savings. A practical manifestation of this attitude of Fascista policy was the Royal Decree of last July abolishing death duties on estates left to near relatives and greatly reducing them in the case of succession between more distant relatives. Nitti and Giolitti had raised death duties to percentages amounting almost to confiscation. On the other hand, Signor Mussolini introduced the eight hours' law for all occupations, with certain necessary exceptions ; the decree provided, however, that the eight hours must be hours of real work, and that in cases where

attendance only was required a larger number of hours was permissible.<sup>1</sup> Some of the labour conventions concluded at Washington in 1919, which previous Cabinets had left unratified, were ratified by that of Signor Mussolini in March, 1923, and others subsequently.

Other schemes concerning the organization of labour have been ventilated, such as Signor Edmondo Rossoni's proposal for the constitution of a labour Parliament to deal with questions of production and labour, which would be withdrawn from the competence of the political Parliament,<sup>2</sup> a scheme which has not yet materialized.

Fascista syndicalism aims at uniting as large a part of the elements of production in Fascismo. This does not mean that Fascismo wishes to establish a monopoly of organization, as it leaves the non-Fascista organizations absolute freedom to operate, as long as they do not dabble in revolutionary politics; but it is trying, by means of its corporations, to establish close collaboration between the various productive forces of the country, to develop national economy in all fields of activity and to eliminate social conflicts.

<sup>1</sup> As in the case of certain classes of railwaymen; see p. 215.

<sup>2</sup> *Il Giornale d'Italia*, January 12, 1923.

## CHAPTER XIV

### RESULTS AND PROSPECTS

**W**HAT are the results hitherto obtained by Fascismo and the Fascista Government, and what are its effects on Italian life?

As we have seen, the most urgent problem was the restoration of order. I have already described the situation as it was before the Fascista Government came into power, but to understand what the problem meant to the Italian people one must have spent some time in Italy during the nightmare days of 1919-1922, when everything seemed threatened with dissolution and existence for the ordinary peaceful citizen was a veritable hell. Yet the restoration of normal conditions of life was achieved in an incredibly short time, without bloodshed, and with hardly any real difficulty, the whole structure of organized disorder and crime collapsing with the march on Rome. Never has Italy been more peaceful than since that event.

There remained the other grave difficulty—finance. In a previous chapter I have explained the Fascista financial programme and the beginnings of its realization. It must, however, be borne in mind that finance in the view of the Fascista leaders was not merely a question of balancing the Budget. It was rather a means of transforming and moralizing the Italian political machine as a whole. The suppression of useless officials, of doles to the idle, of subsidies to parasitic institutions, was far more than a question of economy: it involved the elevation of the general tone of public life and the infusion of a sense of responsibility, patriotic self-sacrifice and duty throughout the nation.

The ablest member of the Cabinet after the Prime Minister is undoubtedly Professor De Stefani, the Minister of Finance and Treasury. It was his task to exploit the advantages

of Fascista rule in order to restore the finances of the kingdom which had been so seriously shattered, first by the war and then by the orgy of preposterous demagogic financial legislation under the successive post-war Cabinets. In his financial statement of November, 1922, Signor De Stefani had declared that the deficit for 1922-1923 amounted to 3,586,000,000 lire, while with certain additional expenses it rose to 4,000,000,000. In his speech at the Senate on December 8, 1923, he declared that the deficit had already been reduced to 3,021,000,000, and that for 1923-1924 it would be only 1,187,000,000, as he had said at Milan in May, a remarkable achievement indeed (expenditure 21,360,467,000, revenue 20,172,931,000). He estimated that in 1924-1925 it would be further reduced to about 700,000,000, and hoped to balance the budget in two or three years. It was also satisfactory to note that the total note circulation has been decreased by nearly 1,000,000,000 lire since October, 1922. He spoke of the 50,000 financial "deserters" to be roped in, besides some 1,000,000 wage-earners who had heretofore been exempted from taxation on account of the demagogic ideas previously predominating, and 1,315,000 landowners and peasants farming their own land. A limit was imposed on local taxation, which had reached intolerable proportions, the general system of taxation was simplified, and it was definitely decided that there should be no further increases for the present in the State taxes, which indeed the minister hoped to be able to reduce at an early date. Drastic economies continued to be enforced in every department, the expenditure on public works was strictly limited. The railway deficit for 1921-22 was stated by Edoardo Torre in February, 1924, to be 1,258,000,000, it was reduced to 906,000,000 for 1922-1923, to 375,000,000 in 1923-1924, and by 1925-1926 it was to be totally eliminated.<sup>1</sup> The possibility of handing over the whole or part of the system to private enterprise was and is being considered. The postal, telegraph, and telephone services now showed a

<sup>1</sup> By January 1, 1924, the staff of the State railways was reduced to 179,777, approximately the pre-war figure, while the traffic returns in the second half of 1923 increased by 170,000,000 as compared with the corresponding period of 1923.

surplus, he announced on December 8th. Further economies were effected by abolishing the Guardia Regia, and compensation for war damages, amounting to 1,200,000,000, was to be spread over twenty-five years by the issue of special bonds at 3·50 per cent, enabling the Government to pay the indemnities at once at the rate of 75 per cent of the total of each claim, instead of 100 per cent spread over several years.

The importance of this Budget statement lies in the fact that it proves the increase of expenditure to have been stopped and that reductions were at last really being effected. The problem was by no means yet solved, and the last millions of the deficit are always the hardest to wipe out ; at first it was comparatively easy to cut down the most scandalous forms of governmental extravagance and waste, but now it needs very careful handling to effect the further necessary reductions of expenditure without jeopardizing efficient administration. Nor was it easy to resist the pressure of demands for fresh public works. Yet, as we shall see in the last chapter, Sig. De Stefani has solved the financial problem.

The economic situation of the country was less satisfactory than the financial one, owing to the general economic stagnation all over Europe ; but the conditions of Italy were relatively better than those of some other countries, and during the latter half of 1923 many industries were reviving. Imports tend to decrease and exports to increase, while the invisible exports in the shape of emigrants' remittances and the sums spent by foreign tourists in Italy greatly reduce the unfavourable balance of trade.<sup>1</sup> Unemployment is also decreasing : it is now about 200,000, i.e., only a little above the normal pre-war figure. Import duties on certain classes of goods (flour, wheat-paste, bread, ship's biscuit, etc.) are being reduced, and,

<sup>1</sup> In 1923 imports amounted to 17,235,000,000 lire (15,764,700,000 in 1922), and exports to 11,058,800,000 (9,302,300,000 in 1922), leaving an unfavourable balance of 6,176,200,000 (6,462,400,000 in 1922 and 15,000,000,000 in 1921) ; this was covered by the tourist traffic (2,500,000,000), emigrants' remittances (2,800,000,000), interest on investments abroad, the return of Italian capital which had migrated abroad in 1919-22, etc. ("Italian Business and Financial Report," March 1, 1924).

there is some tentative action in favour of freer trade. The harvest of 1923 was exceptionally good. No less than 61,000,000 quintals of wheat were harvested that year as compared with 44,000,000 in 1922 and 38,000,000 in 1920 ; this meant that 17,000,000 quintals less wheat would have to be purchased abroad than in the previous year. The vintage too constituted a bumper crop (48,000,000 quintals). While these increases were largely due to natural causes, the general sense of security engendered by the advent of the Fascista Government was also in part responsible for them. The landlords felt encouraged to improve their land and extend and intensify cultivation, while the peasants, no longer distracted by strikes, could devote greater attention to farming. In an essentially agricultural country like Italy a good harvest is an extremely valuable asset in making the mass of the people content. The peasants have never been so prosperous before.

Indeed, the general sense of security continued to react favourably on the economic situation as a whole. Neither industry nor trade were hampered by endemic strikes any more than agriculture ; the few labour disputes which broke out from time to time were rapidly and amicably settled, and the workers' output continued to improve both in quantity and quality. From November 1, 1922 to October 31, 1923, only 227,000 working days had been lost through strikes as compared with 8,000,000 for the corresponding period of 1921-1922. The railway service, as we have seen, was greatly improved ; the trains were more punctual, goods were delivered more regularly, thefts and damage were considerably reduced.<sup>1</sup> Capital, although still very heavily taxed, was no longer overburdened by intolerable taxation, and the capitalist no longer felt that, however hard and honestly he worked, he was regarded by the Government as a criminal who deserved to be plundered and strangled. Every one consequently felt greater encouragement to save. In 1923 1,464 new limited liability companies were constituted with a total net increase of capital of 3,982,634,793 lire.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Compensation in 1922-1923 amounted to 61,000,000 as compared with 127,000,000 in the previous year.

<sup>2</sup> *Critica fascista*, March 1, 1924.

There was no appreciable improvement in the rate of exchange, the lira remaining fairly stable at about 100 to the £, nor was there any serious reduction in the cost of living, except in a very few articles. The advent of Fascismo brought about some improvement at first, but the occupation of the Ruhr and the general confusion in the reparations question brought the lira down again. Only a satisfactory settlement of that question and of that of inter-Allied debts will really improve the exchanges, although in the long run the improvement in the financial situation of Italy cannot fail to have some effect on them. In January, 1924, the value of the lira closely approached that of the French franc, and afterwards actually surpassed it, while it had for a long time been several points above that of the Belgian franc.

Apart from finance there were many other abuses to be dealt with, and to this end Signor Mussolini undertook to carry through a series of important political and administrative reforms. It was not enough to do away with the most crying abuses and reform the bureaucracy : it must be made impossible for "the old unhappy far-off things" ever to return. One of the chief obstacles to useful reform and good administration in the past had been the degeneration of Parliament. This had been going on for years before the war, but since the Armistice the situation had become worse than ever. No Government could take any action without first consulting the various parties and groups, and it could never count on a stable majority. It was the slave of its own supporters and even of its adversaries, whom it had to conciliate in order to attenuate their opposition ; the deputies were the servants of their constituents, and both the Government and the deputies had to consider the demands, caprices, and passions of their masters rather than the general interests of the nation. Parliament had become a bear garden of unseemly riots and a hotbed of intrigue, wherein the struggle for power was the only consideration. The introduction of the system of proportional representation had brought about no real improvement, and had indeed intensified some of the drawbacks of parliamentarism. The same thing has happened in

other countries besides Italy, but Italy, being poorer than most of her neighbours, could less afford to suffer these evils.

Mussolini's object was, as I have said, not merely to eliminate the existing evils while he remained in office, but to educate the people so that they should be eliminated for ever, and for this he deemed certain radical reforms necessary. When he came into power he had expressed his contempt for the Chamber of Deputies, but in so doing he merely voiced in crude language the feelings of the great mass of the people, who had lost all respect for their elected representatives. As he said in his speech at Perugia on October 31, 1923, the battle of Fascismo was directed "against the spirit of avoiding all responsibility, and against evil political and parliamentary customs, against the degeneration of democracy, against the licence which profaned the sacred name of freedom." We have seen why the Premier did not dissolve the Chamber at once; a general election under existing conditions would have returned a Chamber not very different from the actual one, and although he was sure of a Fascista majority, it would have been an unstable one, and the work of the Government would be hampered as that of its predecessors had been. Various schemes were drafted for reforming Parliament and parliamentary methods. One proposal, suggested by Michele Bianchi, the permanent Under Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior, which found some support in certain Fascista circles, was somewhat on the lines of the United States Constitution; the head of the Government (the Premier in the case of Italy, the President in the U.S.) was to be elected by the Chamber and not by the electorate for a certain period of years, during which he would be free to carry on the Government without the risk of being ousted from office until his term was up; at the end of his term he would have to render account of his stewardship to Parliament. But such a system did not appeal to public opinion nor to the majority of the Fascista leaders, and was rejected; Mussolini determined to alter the electoral system alone and not the Constitution.

Before undertaking so important a reform he had to consider the attitude of the various tendencies of public opinion. The Socialist-Communist opposition had been definitely put out of action. The demagogues and sentimentalists who coquettled with Socialism he could afford to disregard. There remained two important parties—the Liberals and the Popolari. Among the former there were many who had sincerely supported the Government from the beginning, while others had rallied to it during the past few months. There remained the small but relatively influential group of “pure” Liberals voiced by the *Corriere della Sera* which still held back because it considered that the Government was not acting in conformity with the classical Liberal tradition ; it must be added that there was also a certain personal element in this opposition. The electoral reform scheme met with strong disapproval on the part of the “die-hards.” The Popolari, while professing themselves favourable to the Government on the whole, continued to oppose it at every turn. But the party was no longer as compact as it had been, and the Government continued to enjoy the support of the Vatican, which was, of course, a most valuable asset. The Prime Minister presented his Bill to Parliament in the early summer ; it contained the following features : the whole country is first made into a single electoral constituency, and every voter votes for the party list which he prefers, each list comprising a number of candidates for each of the fifteen constituencies into which the country is divided. The result of this vote indicates the strength of the various parties, and the party which secures relatively the largest number of votes has a right to two-thirds of the seats in the Chamber, the remaining third being distributed among the other parties on a basis of proportional representation. The object of the scheme was to give stability to the Government. Hitherto, as we have seen, no Cabinet could count on a stable majority, as, owing to the prevalence of the group system, every new Cabinet could only exist on sufferance by juggling with a coalition of groups. The scheme met with a considerable amount of criticism in

certain quarters, especially among the Popolari and some of the pure Liberals, but the Prime Minister's eloquent speech in defence of the measure delivered in the Chamber on July 16, 1923, so impressed his audience that he received an overwhelming vote of confidence (303 to 140); the resolution to discuss the articles of the Bill was voted by 235 to 139, 77 (mostly Popolari) abstaining. The articles were then discussed and the Bill was voted; it went up to the Senate in November, and after a clear and convincing defence by Signor Acerbo, Under Secretary to the Presidency of the Council, it was voted by 165 to 41 on the 14th.

It is of course impossible to say how the system will work out in practice until it has been tried. It raises a new conception of constitutional government, by its attempt to eliminate one of the worst defects of parliamentarism as it exists in all countries where there are not two, or at most three, well-defined and organized political parties. It must be admitted that the discussions on electoral reform, while arousing a certain amount of interest among constitutional lawyers, journalists and, above all, candidates, were followed by the mass of the public with indifference. The relief at the liberation of the country from parliamentary intrigue was so great that the people cared little as to the manner in which the deputies were elected so long as Mussolini remained at the head of affairs. However, the Prime Minister, true to his policy of "returning to legality," decided to appeal to the country. On December 11, 1923, he closed the Parliamentary Session, which was generally regarded as the prelude to an imminent dissolution, but at the time no official pronouncement was issued. At the Cabinet Council of December 31st, the seventy-eighth since the Government had come into office, it was decided to renounce the full powers accorded to the Cabinet in November, 1922, which had enabled it to carry out so many useful reforms. On January 25, 1924, the King signed the Decree dissolving the Chamber and providing that the general elections should be held on April 6th, and that the new Parliament should meet on May 24th—the

date, the anniversary of Italy's declaration of war against Austria, was not without significance.

Together with the Royal Decree, the report of the Cabinet to the King proposing the dissolution was published. It is a document of considerable importance, in which the Prime Minister's views on constitutional government are set forth. After pointing out how "the living forces of the nation, witnesses of the general collapse of the State, concentrated and organized by Fascismo, had cleared the ground in October, 1922, in order that the nation should regain confidence in itself," the report dwelt on the strong popular support accorded to the Government. Unlike former Cabinets, "which were solely emanations of fluctuating parliamentary majorities, often formed regardless of the popular will, the new Cabinet was undoubtedly the administration of a parliamentary minority; it had nevertheless asked for the co-operation of Parliament, which had been immediately granted." It might indeed have taken advantage of the wave of popular enthusiasm of the moment to appeal to the country at once; it had refused to do so because it did not wish to demand approval of a historic deed the entire responsibility for which it was prepared to take upon itself, but preferred "to apply for a serene and conscious verdict on the work of reconstruction which it was undertaking." After fifteen months of intense activity, the Government hands back to Parliament, as it had undertaken to do, the full powers delegated to it, and considers the time ripe for the dissolution of a Chamber elected in circumstances very different from those of the present time. The objects of the new electoral law (the constitution of a stable and homogeneous administration) are then explained, and the report goes on to declare that "in the coming elections the Government intends that the electoral body shall not limit itself, as in the past, to creating an assembly, but shall by its vote express its explicit judgment on the work accomplished and on the whole programme of the party in office." The Fascista conception of the State has no need to encroach on any of the fundamental principles of the Constitution, which lends itself to all forms of evolu-

tion, so that men and circumstances have ever been able to improve and adapt it. The Fascista Government "is the strongest vindication of that ideal unity which harmonizes all tendencies operating within the orbit of national life." The State must not be the expression of any particular class; it should, on the contrary, "be always and everywhere the living image of the continuity of the country's thought, the jealous guardian of tradition, the defender of the law, the chief inspirer of national sentiment. But it must reduce its economic activities to a minimum, leaving full freedom in this field to private enterprise, while providing that the interests of individuals and classes shall yield to those of the people as a whole.

"In view of this conception, so diametrically opposed to the one whereby the State had been withdrawn from national life and forced to stand aside in the struggles wherein its very existence was at stake, Your Government has from the day it first came into office set forth its programme of practical measures calculated to prevent the disintegration of the country and to re-establish the foundations of national reconstruction both in the material and the spiritual order. It believes that, amid great difficulties, to a large extent natural, but also in part artificial, it has carried out its undertaking." After summing up the chief reforms carried out up to date and the solution of many international difficulties, the report adds: "It is on the continuation and further development of this general policy that Your Government wishes the country to express its unequivocal verdict. While the Government counts on the support and co-operation of Parliament and recognizes the true value of the elective Chamber, it denies to the latter the character of a fulcrum round which the whole public life of the country must revolve as it did in the years of political decadence," considering it rather as "but one of the fundamental elements which, in harmony with the others, contributes to regulate the life of the State." This is of course an affirmation of one of Mussolini's main political conceptions, viz. that the Chamber of Deputies must not be allowed to exercise absolute predominance over all the

other organs of Government, but that the Crown, the Executive, the Chamber and the Senate all have their allotted functions, and no one must encroach on those of the others.

The task of the twenty-seventh Legislature, the report goes on to state, will be a formidable one, for it will be expected to complete and co-ordinate the administrative and financial work of the Government. Youthful energy must be infused into the functions of the State by means of the technical and professional representative bodies and the gradual participation of women in public life (measures have already been prepared for establishing technical professional councils endowed with wide powers and for female suffrage in the local administrations). "The working classes having been drawn into the orbit of the State, of which they are an integral and active part, a feeling of national solidarity must govern all social relations subjected to a common rule of civil and political discipline." In conclusion, after dwelling on the security now guaranteed to production by the action of the Government and the restoration of public confidence, and expressing the conviction that the people will lend its full support to a policy which aims at the achievement of the nation's destinies, as it has always done in the past, the Cabinet submits to the King's signature the decree of dissolution.

Three days later a great assembly of all the leaders and office-holders of the Fascista party throughout Italy was held in Rome in the Palazzo Venezia, where the Prime Minister delivered an eloquent fighting speech on the duties of Fascismo in view of the elections. He begins by confessing that he by no means looks forward to the coming months, for the mere announcement that a dissolution was imminent "had sufficed to bring to the surface all that is vainest and most pusillanimous." He did not hesitate to allude to the inner travail of the Fascista party and the expulsion or secession of some of its adherents, adding that within the last fifteen months the party had been entirely dissolved and reconstructed, but that this transformation had by no means impaired its efficiency. He stigmatized

the mania for *purismo*, viz. the tendency of those who demanded that no one should exercise authority or influence within the party save those who had joined from the beginning and who alone could be regarded as "truly converted."<sup>1</sup> "Let there be an end, he said, "to all this talk of Fascisti of the first hour and those of the last; this criterium does not suffice to distinguish the best from the worst." He also reproved the attempt to distinguish between "Fascismo" and "Mussolinismo," and to consider him as apart from his party, which was only an insidious way of opposing the new revival of Italy.

There has been much talk, he said, of a return to "normal conditions." The last remnants of illegality still existing would have definitely disappeared had it not been for an irresponsible and criminal opposition, and if dastardly attacks on, and murders of, Fascisti did not still occur from time to time. "If by 'normal conditions' is meant the disbanding of that militia which is a national and not a party force, and is designed to overawe all those whom we have spared, I declare from this moment that I shall never fall a victim to this trickery of 'normal conditions'; a return to these conditions is by no means promoted by the gentlemen of the Constitutional opposition, who should be regarded as the most dangerous enemies of the Government and the Fascista party." He reminded his audience that the Fascista revolution had not involved human victims—no reign of terror had been instituted, no exceptional laws enacted. The Government had availed itself of its powers to repress not manifestations of liberty tempered by discipline, but the expressions of a licence which Fascismo will not tolerate. He mentioned in support of his argument, some fifteen cases of aggression against Fascisti during the month of January alone, resulting in two deaths and a number of other casualties.

In the second part of his speech Mussolini explained his reasons for appealing to the country and read out the following resolution on the relations of Fascismo with other

<sup>1</sup> Those who had entered the ranks in the early days resented the fact that responsible positions in the party and the various administrations had been conferred on more recent recruits.

parties, which was submitted to and voted on by the Fascista Council the next day :

"The National Fascista party, on account of its origins, its methods, its objects, and also its experience since 1921, definitely rejects all proposals for electoral alliances, and still more those for political alliances, with the old parties, whatever their name or character, also because their attitude towards the Fascista party and Government has never been wholly unambiguous. It resolves, however, in conformity with its methods, to include in its electoral list men of all parties, or of no party, who can be relied upon to render useful services to the nation on account of their past record, especially at the time of Italy's intervention in the war, during the war, and after the war, and of their eminent qualities as experts or scholars." Speaking of the Social Democrats and the Liberals, both of them represented in his own Cabinet, Mussolini declared that their attitude towards Fascismo had not been uniform, especially that of the Liberals, who were divided into several groups, some of whom had strongly supported the Government, while others had been its opponents. This circumstance rendered any alliance with these parties as such impossible; but Fascismo is willing to accept as allies individual statesmen belonging to them, for the Fascista Government is outside all parties and all designations of a Parliamentary character.

The speaker further alluded to the international position of Fascismo : "In a parliamentarized Europe the Italian elections will be followed with particular interest. . . . Fascismo, although a typically Italian phenomenon, has now assumed the aspect of a world-wide experiment. It represents the repudiation of the whole Socialist and Democratic doctrine; it has risen boldly against that mass of theories which the experience of contemporary history has inexorably condemned." "Fascismo, as a doctrine of national development, of force, of discipline, of repugnance for all the commonplaces of demagogic and for the antics of the politicians, is a beacon of light to which all the peoples of the earth are gazing." At the close of his speech

he expressed his absolute confidence that if it were necessary to appeal to all the forces of Fascismo, the differences of opinion existing within its ranks would disappear. "Many of those who were expelled from Fascismo, but who yet retain a hankering for it within their hearts, would return to the fold and ask to be allowed to fight." "Fascismo is endowed with the virtue necessary for facing any sacrifice, it is firmly decided to hold that which it has conquered, and no less firmly decided to achieve yet more splendid victories."

This oration was received with enthusiastic applause. The following day the Fascista Press and the papers in sympathy with the Government expressed their full approval, only a few opposition organs, such as the Turin *Stampa*, criticizing it on account of what they regarded as its intolerant and uncompromising tone. But, apart from certain phrases, which might appear indiscreet (it should be remembered that it was above all an election speech), its tendency was one of strength combined with sound sense. Mussolini's refusal to ally himself with other parties, even though they were Constitutional, is easily explained when we reflect that, except for the Socialists and the Popolari, who were in opposition, none of the other groups were organized parties at all, each of them comprising men of very different opinions. On the one hand, numbers of individuals of all parties or no party offered the fullest guarantees of patriotic conduct and technical competence and efficiency, and without officially joining Fascismo were capable of strengthening the Government with their support; while on the other, not a few men belonging to the same parties or groups as the former had compromised with the most insidious enemies of the nation, and even coquetted with the undisguised Bolsheviks when the latter seemed to enjoy a large measure of popular support and were threatening revolution. Hence the Prime Minister's decision to make a selection of individuals.

The directorate of the Liberals accepted this invitation, and on January 30th voted a resolution authorizing its members "to accept inclusion in the Government's list of candidates, and whenever it considered it necessary, in

order to combat and weaken the anti-national forces, to participate with its own men in trying to secure seats reserved for the minorities."

The meeting of the Fascista Council on the 29th was devoted to the activities of the Fascista party during the coming elections and the duties of the directorate; the composition of the latter Mussolini refused to modify at the present moment, as it was working satisfactorily and it was desirable to avoid disagreements within the party ranks.

On the following day the Prime Minister delivered another fiery speech to several thousand officers of the National Militia, setting forth the duties of that institution, which was destined, he said, even to guarantee the freedom of the ballot box in the coming elections.

Certain moral aspects of Fascismo should be mentioned in order to explain the hold which it has acquired over so large a section of the nation. No other political organization since the Risorgimento had appealed so earnestly to the higher nature of the Italian people, or had imposed such sacrifices on its adherents for the sake of the public good. The Socialists in the early days of the movement had a certain spiritual element in their original conception, and indeed many of their proposals have been adopted by Liberals and Conservatives; but the material aspects of the creed soon absorbed all the activities of the party, which ended by appealing only to the lowest instincts of greed and selfishness. As long as the Fascisti were a small minority and it was a serious risk to be seen with a Fascista badge or express Fascista sentiments in public, only the elect joined the movement, and if after the October days the ranks of the party swelled with the influx of masses of people who were not all wholly desirable, yet the spiritual influence of the founders remained and continued to leaven the whole. This explains the confidence of the nation, including many non-Fascisti, in Fascista methods and in Mussolini, in spite of the inevitable errors of the Government and the shortcomings of some of the leaders, as well as the hardships inflicted by some necessary measures.

The aim of the Fascista leaders is to reconstruct the nation on a new basis, in which spiritual values shall predominate over materialism. Patriotism, embodying the sense of duty, the spirit of self-sacrifice and a rigid moral and material discipline in all, is the foundation of the system, combined with the widest freedom of individual action in the economic field. The State must be reduced to its proper functions, viz. the maintenance of order, the enforcement of the law, the defence of the country against foreign enemies, and the general encouragement of civilization, education, and progress, which had been largely neglected under previous administrations. On the other hand, it must abstain from all activities for which it is unfitted ; it must not be a merchant, a manufacturer, a farmer, or even a railway owner, for whenever it has tried to do these things, the results have been disastrous, not only from an economic and financial point of view, but also on account of the demoralizing effect which these activities produce on the bureaucracy and on the people as a whole.

It is the nobility of the aims of Fascismo which enabled it to sweep away in a few days the whole organization of graft, parasitism and incompetence, which for decades had been sucking the life-blood of the country and exploiting the hard-working honest people, who only asked to be allowed to conduct their own business in their own way and look after their homes, their fields, and their families. As the distinguished scholar Professor Girolamo Vitelli wrote to a friend, who had informed him of the creation of a Fascista section in the professor's native town, Santa Croce del Sannio, " to have broken that close network of intrigue and mean ambitions which characterized Italy's so-called political life during the last forty years and more is a great merit, even if it has been necessary to resort to illegality and violence. Let us hope that the men in power to-day will really be able to recreate that pure national and political conscience, without which nations cannot prosper and Governments become sinks of iniquity."<sup>1</sup>

I shall mention two instances of Fascista action which

<sup>1</sup> *Giornale d'Italia*, January 24, 1923.

strongly appealed to the popular imagination on account of their spiritual character, one of which occurred before and the other after the advent of Fascismo to power. The explosion of Fort Falconara near Spezia on September 28, 1922, where large quantities of munitions were contained, resulted in over 1,200 casualties, including 200 killed, the destruction of the village of San Terenzio and serious damage to a number of other places. Before the authorities and troops could arrive on the scene of the disaster the Fascista squadre from the neighbouring districts were on the spot in military formation and provided with all necessaries, and at once began relief work in a most thoroughly efficient manner. Since its creation, it is the National Militia which carries out these duties. The other episode occurred at Alessandria. There had been a considerable increase of crime in that town, especially thefts and burglaries. The police having failed to deal satisfactorily with the situation, the leaders of the local Fascio took the matter into their own hands. They summoned all the habitual known criminals of the town to a meeting on a certain evening by means of a printed circular. Not one of the "guests" failed to appear, and they were warned by Dr. Raimondo Sala, the secretary of the local Fascio, that they must henceforth mend their ways and work honestly; if they really tried to do so the Fascisti would find jobs for them, but anyone who relapsed would no longer be dealt with by ordinary justice, based on the articles of the code: "no longer will the prison cell await them, but the Fascista bludgeon which sends people straight to the hospital, and sometimes even to the mortuary chapel." One after another every man of them took the pledge, and from thenceforth there was a noticeable diminution of crime in the town. In other towns similar experiments have been tried with success.

If the Fascista spirit can be summed up in one word, it is youth. Not for nothing is the title of the Fascista hymn, which has become one of the national anthems of Italy, "Giovinezza." Until Fascismo came into prominence age was regarded in Italy as the one indispensable qualification for any important position in politics, the civil services, or

the professions. Youth was a serious handicap. Italian statesmen and high officials, even if not very old, tried to appear as if they were, lest they should be regarded as rash youths unfit to be entrusted with serious responsibilities. A Cabinet Minister who played tennis or rode to hounds would have been regarded as a public danger, while many prominent men continued to hold important positions long after they were past work, and indeed had become quite *gaga*. But now all this is changed. We have a Prime Minister of 40, several other Ministers aged from 30 to 40, and a number of Fascista leaders under 30. Nearly all the men prominent in the Fascista ranks have fought in the war and a great many are decorated for valour. Not only are they young in years but also in health and spirits. Most of the Ministers are athletes ; Mussolini himself is a keen fencer, a good horseman, and drives his own racing car ; Acerbo is an aviator, Finzi an all-round sportsman, and indeed every form of sport is encouraged by the Government.

With youth and the sporting spirit at the helm, enthusiasm is inevitable. The old cynical scepticism, which was so characteristic of Italian public life in the past, is done away with ; every one sincerely believes that the country will be thoroughly reformed and made truly worthy of its great destinies, and that conviction is half the battle. The Fascisti might take as their motto the words of Edmond Rostand : " Le seul vice c'est l'inertie, la seule vertu c'est l'enthousiasme."

There is certainly a new spirit of keenness abroad throughout the land. Not to mention the improvement in the railways and other public services, the new broom is evident in all the Government departments. Letters are answered at once, business is conducted more efficiently, discipline is maintained, and every one is, or at least tries to appear, strenuous. The effort is very serious for officials of the old type, accustomed to easy-chair methods, and there will no doubt be cases of backsliding and lapses from grace ; but the general tendency is in the right direction.

Another aspect of Fascista policy and more particularly of the Prime Minister's own attitude is the determination

to restore the outward dignity of the State. For many decades successive Governments, under the influence of demagogic tendencies and the shibboleth of "democratic simplicity," had done their best to render the State, its functions, and its officials as mean and shabby as possible, lest they be accused of "aristocratic" leanings, although they were apt to indulge in much useless extravagance in other fields. The new Government, on the contrary, was determined to confer on all manifestations of an official character a dignity which undoubtedly has its value. Signor Mussolini has had the splendid apartments at Palazzo Venezia restored, and they are now used for official receptions and ceremonies, which are on a stately scale, to which the public had long been unaccustomed. The judicial year of the Court of Cassation, now, as we have seen, a single one for all Italy, was inaugurated with great solemnity in the presence of the Prime Minister himself, accompanied by most of the other Ministers and many high dignitaries, the judges and lawyers in their robes of office. The Council of State, the *Contenzioso diplomatico* (an advisory council on diplomatic affairs), and other important official bodies were likewise inaugurated with adequate ceremonial. Signor Mussolini, himself always impeccably attired, insists that at all official functions uniforms should be worn by those entitled to wear them, and dress clothes or frock coats by others; he will not stand any of the out-of-date "shirt-sleeves and democracy" nonsense, because the State, for the sake of its prestige, must not only be dignified, but it must also appear so externally, as the mass of the public in Italy, as in every other country of the world, is always impressed by ceremonial.

It would not of course be accurate to attribute the whole merit of this change to a single man. But there is no doubt that the remarkable personality of Benito Mussolini counts for a great deal in this new Italian Renaissance. He is certainly a very forceful character, and is possessed of an intuition amounting to genius. Before he came into power he was known as a man of courage, intelligence, and energy, and as an admirable organizer. The ability with

which he exploited the exasperation of public feeling against incompetent and pusillanimous administrations, the reaction against the intolerable tyranny and the criminal anti-patriotism of the Reds, and the enthusiasm of the innumerable youths who had done their duty in the war, in order to create the Fascista organization is sufficient proof of these qualities. The rigid discipline which he succeeded in imposing on an organization comprising hundreds of thousands of members, many of them like himself energetic personalities, bears witness to his magnetic influence, while his speeches are extraordinarily eloquent in their vigorous incisive phrases, like hammer strokes, and wholly free from rhetoric.

But when he became Prime Minister he showed other qualities of an even higher calibre. His very first acts were those of a real statesman. His colleagues who assisted at the first Cabinet Council of the Fascista Ministry, several of whom had been Ministers or held high office before, were deeply impressed by the mastery with which he conducted the debates as though to the manner born. It seemed, one of them told the writer, as if that were not the first meeting of a new Cabinet under a new man, but the continuation of a meeting which had just been temporarily adjourned under the chairmanship of a veteran statesman. Everything proceeded naturally and logically, without improvisation. He showed considerable political insight in some of his appointments. On his advent to power three embassies became vacant, and while those of Paris and Berlin were filled by distinguished professional diplomats, that of Washington was given to Don Gelasio Caetani, a man who had never held an official position before, but who, although a member of the great and wealthy Roman house of Sermoneta, had worked as a miner in the United States and eventually made a successful career as a mining engineer; he had afterwards returned to Italy to devote himself to the improvement of his estates and the publication of the family archives, and after distinguishing himself during the war as an engineer officer<sup>1</sup> had been elected to Parliament

<sup>1</sup> It was he who prepared the mine which blew up the Col di Lana in the Trentino.

as a Nationalist. No better choice could have been made for that position. Another happy selection was that of General De Bono as Director-General of Public Safety, an appointment hitherto usually conferred on men whose chief qualification was their devotion to the political interests of this or that statesman, as a rule of Giolitti. With the advent of the new Government the situation was peculiarly delicate; the restoration of order was imperative and the Fascista squadre must be prevented from continuing in their illegal actions. General De Bono had not only been a very gallant soldier in the war, but had joined Fascismo in his disgust at the conduct of the post-war Governments, and had organized the military side of the movement. Although he had retired from active service he was in *posizione ausiliaria speciale*<sup>1</sup> and still to some extent liable to military discipline, so that the Minister of War had actually instituted proceedings against him for his connexion with militant Fascismo. Mussolini by appointing him Director of Public Safety chose the one man who could handle both the regular police and exercise complete authority over the Fascisti; it was in fact De Bono who created the National Militia in order to bring the Fascista squadre directly under the authority of the State.

Another of Mussolini's qualities is his rapidity of decision. As Professor Gioacchino Volpe writes,<sup>2</sup> "Ministers under the old regime could never make up their minds to anything without incredible delay and then only adopted half measures. They showed every symptom of a kind of moral senility, viz. lack of decision, slowness of action, inability to dare. Look at these recent times. Whole months passed before they could find a man to appoint president of the Corte dei Conti. Hesitation, uncertainty, adjournments without end before a general manager could be found for the railways, which had become the canker of Italian finance and economy. Decrees announced and published, withdrawn and re-issued within a single week.

<sup>1</sup> A kind of half pay conferred upon especially distinguished officers who wished to retire from active service.

<sup>2</sup> "Giovane Italia," in *Gerarchia*, January, 1923.

. . . Ministers nearly all away on their holidays, ambassadors nearly all absent from their posts." Under Mussolini's regime we find none of this hesitation. As soon as a position becomes vacant it is filled at once. As soon as a new official is appointed he is expected to join up at once. Ambassadors and ministers who were accustomed to receive instructions in which it was suggested that they might find means of conveying to the Government to which they were accredited a delicate hint that it would be desirable to follow a certain line of action, without of course in any way compromising the Italian Government and making all due reserves, etc., etc., were now ordered bluntly to say to that Government—colon and inverted commas !

Another of his great qualities is his readiness to listen to views not in conformity with his own and not infrequently to adopt them. In the summer of 1919, some time before D'Annunzio went to Fiume, Mussolini was contemplating an action of the same kind and went to that town to *tâter le terrain*. But the general commanding the Italian garrison and other staff officers called his attention to the serious consequences of an international and internal character which they regarded as likely to ensue from such an enterprise ; Mussolini was convinced and gave up the scheme. On another occasion, when he had just become Premier, he had a discussion with a high Italian official who advocated a view on an important question of foreign policy which differed from that held by himself. He listened attentively and ended by replying : " What you have said is profoundly true." He subsequently acted in conformity with the suggestion made to him.

He seems to be absolutely free from petty spite. Although supported by the great mass of public opinion, he has of course a number of opponents, especially among those who were in office until he ousted them from power. But he has abstained from all acts of vengeance or spite, and has even left many of his strongest adversaries in important positions. In the wide reform of the civil services which he has undertaken a number of officials have been placed

on the retired list on account of age or unfitness, and a certain number dismissed for serious misconduct. But no one has been punished for mere opposition, however active and virulent, to the new Government. One man alone Mussolini cannot forgive—Nitti—because he has wrought too great injury to Italy.

I am not dealing with the Italian foreign policy in this volume, but I will say that even in that field the Government's action has been at once strong, dignified, and conciliatory. Had the course suggested by Mussolini in connexion with the reparations problem been followed by the other Powers, perhaps the extremely complicated question might now be on the way towards settlement.<sup>1</sup> The one instance in which he showed the iron hand was that of the Epirus murders ; as he said in his speech to the Senate, "without the occupation of Corfu, Italy would have had no satisfaction of any kind." It should be added that this was almost the first time for many decades in which the Government's action in the field of foreign affairs met with the absolutely unanimous support of the whole country.

In another question of foreign politics Mussolini achieved success by his moderation and statesmanlike qualities—the thorny Fiume problem. After protracted negotiations, the course of which, not always a smooth one, was kept absolutely secret, a convention was concluded between Italy and Yugoslavia whereby the still-born "independent State" of Fiume created at Rapallo was brought to an end, to the immense relief of its inhabitants, the town being awarded to Italy, and Porto Barros and a small adjoining rural district to Yugoslavia, while special clauses regulated the port and railway services ; a pact of friendship, almost amounting to a defensive alliance, between the two Powers was also signed, and a commercial treaty, now in preparation, will complete the agreement. This, it is hoped, will mark the end of the five years' wrangle between Italy and her eastern neighbour, to the advantage of both and also of the general peace of Europe. If Mussolini succeeded where his predecessors had failed, it was largely owing to

<sup>1</sup> See Mussolini's speech in the Senate on November 23, 1923.

the steadiness and firmness with which he had conducted his foreign and internal policy, engendering in all the conviction that Italy was now a Power with whom it was better to be on friendly than on unfriendly terms, and that there was no likelihood of wresting further concessions from her either by threats, cajolery, or sulking.

There are, however, a number of other very able men among the Fascista leaders and other supporters of the Cabinet, both within its ranks and outside of them. Professor De Stefani, the Finance Minister, I have already mentioned. Luigi Federzoni, the Minister of the Colonies and one of the founders of the Nationalist party, is a very eloquent speaker, a lucid writer, a man of energy and a gallant soldier. Professor Maffeo Pantaleoni, one of the leading economists of Italy, who for years fought a brave fight against the economic heresies of the demagogues and Socialists, has been selected President of the Committee of Control on Austrian Finance, and is one of De Stefani's most trusted advisers ; so, too, is another distinguished economist, Professor Umberto Ricci. Senator Enrico Corradini, who has devoted his whole life to the development of patriotic sentiment among the Italian people, has no official position, but his views as embodied in numerous essays may be regarded as the theoretical basis of the present Government's policy. The late Professor Vilfredo Pareto, one of the most eminent sociologists in Europe and an apostle of free trade, was a strong supporter of the new Government. Professor Corbino, a distinguished scientist, who belongs to no particular party and has never played a part in politics, was selected as Minister of National Economy, thereby absorbing the functions of the ex-Ministries of Agriculture, Trade, and Industry and Labour. Enrico Torre was appointed High Commissioner of Railways, and has undertaken the task of completely overhauling that service, and has, as we have seen, already achieved a considerable measure of success. Giovanni Preziosi, editor of the fighting review *La Vita italiana* and now of the daily *Il Mezzogiorno* of Naples, has

done much to expose the swindles of the Socialist-ridden co-operative societies. Giovanni Giuriati, Minister without portfolio, a much decorated and disabled war veteran, and a man of the most sterling honesty combined with remarkable diplomatic tact and a sound knowledge of the administrative machinery of the State, was first entrusted with the liquidation of ex-enemy property and now with a mission to South America. Dino Grandi, another gallant young war veteran and an excellent organizer, has done much for Fascismo in the field of labour. Among the political men belonging to other parties who are strongly supporting Mussolini is Antonio Salandra, ex-Prime Minister and one of the leaders of the Liberal party; he is now Italian Representative on the Council of the League of Nations.

An account of the Fascista experiment would be incomplete without some mention of its drawbacks. In the first place, with Fascismo in power a sort of dual Government has been established—that of the Government proper and that of the party. Mussolini, it is true, is both the Prime Minister and the "duce" of Fascismo, but it is inevitable that divergences should occasionally occur between the two powers, and although Mussolini is strong enough to compose them when they arise, they represent nevertheless a weak point. With time, however, this dualism will probably be eliminated. Mussolini has indeed already taken some measures in this connexion; the Fascista Grand Council, composed of the leading members of the party, not all of them holding official positions, has been gradually restored to its proper functions as the executive committee of the party competent to deal with party matters only, while the Fascista high commissioners in the provinces, who tended to override the Prefects and nullify their authority (more through the weakness of the latter than the truculence of the former), have been abolished. The *fiduciari*, or trustees of the party in the various towns and districts, who at one moment seemed inclined to take the place of the high commissioners, have been reduced to order, and in fact all the Fascista leaders whose attitude was too sectarian and

uncompromising have been made to understand that Mussolini will not stand any interference with the properly constituted authorities.

A considerable number of persons of doubtful character, not a few of whom had been prominent Nittians or even Communists, became sudden converts to Fascismo when it had triumphed, but retained the whole baggage of Red mentality and habits in their new incarnation. Conversions *in articulo mortis* (of the parties, not of the individuals, who had no intention of dying) are seldom very sincere, and most of these new recruits add little lustre to the movement. In other cases men of no particular views, but who were merely ambitious, adopted Fascismo for personal ends. In Southern Italy, where Fascismo had not arisen as a necessity for fighting revolutionary Socialism, the movement, after its fusion with Nationalism, tended in many places to become involved in the old local feuds that had nothing to do with the true spirit of Fascismo. But here, too, an earnest attempt is being made by the best of the Southern Fascisti to use the movement to crush the various coteries which for decades had ruled supreme for the benefit of a few individuals or families and their clients, but to the detriment of the community as a whole.

A further cause of trouble was disunion among the Fascisti themselves in certain parts of Italy. With the swelling of the party's ranks this was perhaps inevitable. The ambitious aspired to positions of authority and profit, and as there were not enough of these to go round the various candidates formed personal followings and parties within the party, while the prospect of a general election and the distribution of seats intensified these feuds, with the result that internecine squabbles of not too dignified a character broke out here and there. Fortunately they hardly ever came to acts of violence, and Mussolini and the party directorate acted with energy and severity. At the April session of the Fascista Grand Council, when the high commissioners were abolished, the admission of new members was suspended and a rigid process of combing out was undertaken in order to get rid of untrustworthy or

undesirable elements.<sup>1</sup> Since then a number of Fascisti have been expelled, others, including several who had hitherto enjoyed great influence and power, such as Captain Padovani in Naples and Calza in Rome, have been temporarily or permanently deprived of all authority, and in many cases local sections of the Fascio have been dissolved and reconstructed with new elements. Acts of violence against members of other parties are severely dealt with, and on May 7, 1923, the Government issued a *communiqué* imposing on the leaders and rank and file of Fascismo "the most absolute respect for the law. . . . It is the Government's intention to obtain from the party directorate the severest sanctions against leaders and followers who in future should prove not possessed of a sense of the limits of the action, such as has been taught to the Fascista masses in situations very different from that of to-day."<sup>2</sup> On another occasion the Prime Minister also warned the Fascisti that those who were intriguing to secure seats in Parliament in the future elections would be ruthlessly set aside, as he was not going to stand a revival of the electoral trickery of the old type. When Massimo Rocca was expelled from the party for having criticized certain leading Fascisti in the provinces and for opposing certain hot-heads who refused collaboration with the other national parties, Mussolini insisted on the expulsion being revoked. Recently he has been expelled again for attacking the Finance Minister. Fascisti who have been guilty of ordinary offences are prosecuted and punished by the law courts, no favour whatever being shown to them.

When the dissolution was announced a group of dissident Fascisti, including Signor Corgini, an ex-under-secretary, and Signor Misuri, formed a heterodox Fascista association, styling itself *Patria e Libertà*, with a "purist" programme, differing little, save in form, from that of the official Fascista

<sup>1</sup> *Popolo d'Italia*, May 1, 1923.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, May 7, 1923. On May 8th the directorate of the Milan Fascio expelled five members who had tried to set fire to the Camera del Lavoro; this independently of judicial action pending against them. One dereliction in this connexion was the attack on Nitti's house in Rome and the wrecking of its contents by a party of irresponsible Fascisti.

party. It first decided to present a list of candidates in certain provinces in opposition to those included in the Government list, but eventually decided in favour of abstention. Some of its members were undoubtedly sincere and honest men, but somewhat *mauvais coucheurs* and cranks, while others appear to be chiefly inspired by local squabbles and disappointed personal ambitions.

While not wishing to place Fascisti at the head of every Ministry or important department, Mussolini is determined to instil the Fascista spirit into all the organs of the Government, so as to speed up the machine and get rid of the old slipshod methods. To achieve this he has appointed a certain number of well-tried Fascisti to influential positions of various kinds ; thus Michele Bianchi, former general secretary of the party has been appointed permanent Under Secretary to the Ministry of the Interior, several other Fascisti (often retired generals) have been nominated prefects or *questori* (local chiefs of police), and others directors of departments in the various Ministries. Some of these selections have been peculiarly good, but some others less so, and resulted in a certain amount of confusion in the conduct of business, especially when new and inexperienced men were entrusted with duties of a complex technical nature. The intentions were usually excellent, but occasionally the right man was put not in the right place. The extreme youth of many of the prominent Fascisti, with all its many advantages, is not without certain drawbacks. Mussolini's choice in this connexion generally fell upon men who had played a leading part in the Fascista movement before the march on Rome, and nearly all of them were war veterans. It was of course natural that in a revolutionary movement of this kind a number of men who had shown great bravery in the face of danger, and had rendered valuable services to the party in its opposition days, should be rewarded when Fascismo came into power. But it was inevitable that some of these men should prove less fitted for important political and administrative duties under a regular Government conducting business in more or less normal conditions. The

same thing happened in the Risorgimento, and not all of the gallant patriots who had conspired for the union and liberation of Italy between 1820 and 1861, in times when conspiracy meant the risk of hanging or at least of languishing for years in foul prisons, were not always the most suitable for office after the Italian Kingdom had been created. Fortunately the adventurous period of the lives of the Fascisti has been very short, so that there is every chance that when they have grown a little older they will profit by their own experience and adapt themselves to ordinary conditions, while the less desirable will in time be frozen out.

One accusation against the present regime in Italy, which has met with general belief in certain circles abroad, is that Mussolini has suppressed the freedom of the Press, and indeed freedom of thought throughout the country. One English writer who has spent many years in Italy as a journalist went so far as to write in a well-known Review that those who criticize Mussolini can only do so "behind closed doors and after a solemn vow of silence." This of course is merely sensational rubbish, and it is sufficient to spend even a short time in Italy, provided one does not limit oneself to talking with a few disgruntled opponents, to realize it. The great mass of the people support the Government because it is the best Government Italy has ever had since Cavour. But it has its opponents, and they certainly make themselves heard. Apart from the Socialist papers like the *Avanti* and *Giustizia*, which continue to criticize Fascismo with violence, the *Mondo* of Rome, the *Stampa* of Turin, and other papers elsewhere are definitely in opposition, while even the *Corriere della Sera*, as we have seen, often criticizes the acts of the Government, and its general tone is anything but friendly. In private conversation one constantly hears criticisms of the Government and of Fascismo, and of course many of the officials dismissed or put on the retired list for incompetence or dishonesty are anything but warm supporters of Mussolini and the new order of things. As to the Press censorship, of which so much has been made in foreign

newspapers, it was merely a threat made by the Prime Minister at a moment when certain newspapers not only published violent attacks on the Government, but also tendentious news on foreign affairs calculated to endanger good relations with foreign Powers. The measure, however, was never introduced.

The mass of the people, both among the educated classes and the ignorant, are more interested in results than in theories, and no one who compares the state of Italy to-day with that of the days before Fascismo's advent to power can for a moment deny the enormous improvement in every field. "Ora si vive," people say, "mentre prima non si viveva piu'" ("Now we live, whereas before life was not possible"). The spiritual aspects of Fascismo, which I have mentioned, undoubtedly respond to a real need of the Italian people, which had been hitherto repressed, first by the ridicule of the sceptics and later by the terror exercised by the Reds. Many manifestations of this side of Fascismo may strike people from northern countries as theatrical and ridiculous, but each people shows its feelings in different ways, and the symbols and gestures of Fascismo appeal deeply to the Italian spirit. Hero-worship and the cult of the memory of those who fell in the war have become common aspects of Italian life, and they are to a very large extent the outcome of Fascismo.<sup>1</sup> The writer happened to be present at a characteristic Fascista ceremony at Viterbo on the anniversary of the march on Rome, which was being celebrated throughout Italy with great solemnity as a sort of festival of liberation. A cortège of Fascisti, with detachments of the Milizia Nazionale, after parading the streets, marched out of the town to lay wreaths on the spots where a Fascista named Amoroso and a small Czechoslovak boy named Czernin had been murdered by Communists three years before. When the procession reached the scene of the two crimes, the bugle sounded "Attention" and the name of the murdered Fascista was called, to which

<sup>1</sup> I have already mentioned (see p. 132) that the idea of raising a monument to the Unknown Soldier was originally conceived by an Italian officer, although first realized elsewhere.

all the Fascisti replied "Presente." After two minutes' silence the procession moved on, and as it defiled past the Church of Santa Maria della Verità, on the outside wall of which is a tablet with the names of the Viterbesi who fell in the war inscribed on it, the order "Attenti a sinistra, pei nostri morti" ("Eyes left, for our dead") was given, all saluted the fallen, and then the band struck up "Giovinezza." Among the crowd following the procession was a little boy of eight or nine, attired in mourning, his breast covered with war medals: he was the son of an officer who had been killed in the war.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE GENERAL ELECTION—APRIL, 1924

AS soon as the dissolution was announced Mussolini set to work to prepare a list of candidates, who if elected would constitute the Fascista majority in the new Chamber and the Parliamentary basis of the Government. We have seen how all through his activities since he became head of the Government Mussolini was determined to bring Fascismo, in spite of its extra-legal and extra-Parliamentary origins, within the limits of the Constitution, not only because he wished to confer on his Government a Constitutional character, but also because, with a strong Parliamentary backing, he would be able to dominate even the less amenable elements of Fascismo outside Parliament and handle the forces at his disposal for the good of the country more effectively.

According to the new electoral law, as I have already explained, the party securing relatively the largest number of votes throughout the country, i.e. more votes than any other single party, is entitled to two-thirds of the seats in the Chamber. As it was practically certain that the Fascisti would secure this relative majority, the party directorate proceeded to draw up a list of 356 candidates. These, as I have said, were not to be exclusively Fascisti, but to include also a number of eminent political men belonging to other parties who could be counted on to support the Government's policy of national regeneration. Mussolini had come to this decision for two reasons. In the first place, the youthful vitality and energy of the Fascisti, invaluable in the early phases of the movement, now that they had become a Government needed to be leavened by a certain measure of older men more experienced in public affairs. In the second place, whereas Fascismo

was absolutely predominant in North Italy, where not only the upper and middle classes had been won over but also large masses of workmen and peasants, in the South, where revolutionary Socialism and Communism had never secured a footing, Fascismo had appeared less necessary and therefore met with less general support. Consequently, while steadily refusing to contract alliances with other parties as such, Mussolini approached certain leading Liberal and Democratic political men with a view to including them in the Government list. Antonio Salandra, leader of the Right, accepted at once ; the Democrat Orlando hesitated at first, as the Premier had often attacked democratic policy and principles, but ended by falling into line, and his example was followed by others, notably by the Neapolitan Enrico De Nicola, ex-president of the Chamber, and the Calabrese Giuseppe De Nava (who, however, died almost immediately after). This secured wide support for the Government throughout the South, while other leading Liberals in North and Central Italy also accepted Government candidatures.

In the Government camp itself, however, there was one defection. The Duke of Cesaro', leader of the Social Democrats, who had been Postmaster-General since Mussolini came into power, resigned because of the Prime Minister's refusal to contract a definite alliance with the party ; he also disliked the method which had been decided on for the selection of candidates. Cesaro' seems to have attached too much importance to the Social Democratic party as such, although it had no particular programme beyond a vague adherence to democratic principles, and he disapproved of certain prominent members of the Fascista party, although when he made up his own electoral list he did not hesitate to include in it an ex-Minister of Education, Nunzio Nasi, who had been tried and condemned for embezzlement. He soon found himself let down by many other political men on whose support he had counted, including several of his own party, who at the last moment rattled and entered the Government list or abstained from standing.

Cesaro' at least had the merit of sincerity. Certain other politicians of the old school, who certainly had no sympathy with Fascista ideals, now rushed forward to apply for admission to the *listone*. Some quite pitiful scenes were witnessed in Ministerial antechambers while the list was being prepared ; innumerable would-be candidates implored almost on bended knees and with tears in their eyes to be received among the elect—unethereal Peris at the gate of Paradise.

The procedure for making up the Government list was as follows. In each of the fifteen constituencies the local Fascista directorate and the *fiduciario* or trustee of the Central directorate drafted a first list for that area. The fifteen drafts were then submitted to a committee of five appointed *ad hoc*, known as the *Pentarchia*, consisting of Acerbo, Under-Secretary to the Presidency of the Cabinet ; Finzi, Under-Secretary to the Ministry of the Interior ; Michele Bianchi, Permanent Under Secretary to the same Department ; Giunta, Secretary-General of the Fascista party ; and Cesare Rossi, Chief of the Press Bureau. The Pentarchy passed on each list, excluding certain names and replacing them with others, and then submitted the whole to Mussolini for final approval. The completed list included Fascisti, members of the Associazione dei Combattenti, disabled war veterans, gold-medallists, Liberals and Democrats of various shades, Catholics who had seceded from the P. P., etc. As there were a number of prominent Fascisti and others definitely supporting the Government for whom no room could be found in the *listone*, in four constituencies (Lazio-Umbria, Tuscany, Abruzzo-Molise and Puglia) supplementary lists were formed to compete with the minorities for the remaining seats. Between the *listone* and the four supplementary lists (known as *liste bis*) there were some 260 pure Fascisti candidates.

What strikes one in perusing the names of the Government candidates is the very strong preponderance of men who had fought in the war ; no less than 200 were ex-combatants, ten of them decorated with gold medals. The Prime Minister's view was, in fact, that those who had risked their

lives for the country were the best fitted to control its destinies. This tendency had indeed penetrated so deeply into the national spirit that even several of the opposition parties tried to secure as many ex-combatants as possible and advertised the fact in order to secure the favour of the electorate. Another characteristic of the list is the considerable number of men eminent in science, art, literature, and scholarship, and also in industry, agriculture, and finance. This indicates another of Mussolini's tendencies —his appreciation of intellect and expert knowledge, as a reaction against the Socialists' contempt for spiritual and intellectual values.

As none of the other parties believed that they had any chance of securing more votes than the Government, no other majority lists were presented, the various opposition parties and groups contenting themselves with competing for the 179 seats reserved for the minorities. These non-Government lists were very numerous—in some constituencies ten or more were presented. Some of them claimed not to be in opposition to the Government, but only independent of it. The Fascista directorate, however, was very explicit and uncompromising, and on February 27th it declared that the campaign would be conducted with great vigour, not only against the subversive parties, and in particular the Unitari Socialists and the Popolari (the Maximalists, the Communists, and the Republicans were not considered worth mentioning), but also against the Constitutional opposition groups, because "the Italian people must be called upon to express its attitude of approval or disapproval of the Fascista Government clearly and without ambiguity or possibility of misconception."

The Opposition was by no means a single body, nor was there any single opposition group obviously predominating over the others. The three principal Constitutional opposition lists were those of Ivanoe Bonomi, in Lombardy, of Falcioni in Piedmont, and of the Nittian Amendola in the South. But Falcioni himself, who had been Minister under Giolitti, finding that the latter did not support him, accepted the presidency of the Government committee on Italo-Swiss

communications and withdrew his candidature, although his list remained. The Reds were split up into three groups at loggerheads with each other—the Unitari, the Maximalists, and the Communists, and their organization had completely broken down. The Popolare organization maintained itself better, but it too was weakened by the secession of many of its most prominent members, who went over to the Government, such as Mattei-Gentile, editor of the *Corriere d'Italia*, Prince Boncompagni, Martire, etc.; the Vatican's instructions forbidding the clergy from taking an active part in politics paralysed Don Sturzo's activities. The Republicans presented a number of candidates, but they can only be regarded as survivals of a past age. A certain number of Fascisti who disagreed with the party directorate or with some prominent leaders had seceded or been expelled and presented themselves as candidates against the official party, declaring themselves the only true representatives of Fascismo and usually professing loyalty to Mussolini personally. Giolitti presented a list of his own in Piedmont, not unfriendly to the Government, but independent of it.

In all 1,360 candidates were nominated for 535 seats; as there were 356 in the Government list the remaining 179 were competed for by 1,004 candidates. Of these 62 belonged to the Constitutional Opposition, 140 were Popolari, 82 Republicans, 54 Social Democrats, of whom 30 in Sicily alone, 119 Unitari Socialists, 136 Maximalists, 170 Communists, 53 Liberal Democrats, and 166 others. Only the Popolari and the Unitari presented lists in all constituencies, the Maximalists in all but one, the Communists in all but two.

The ballot paper is a single document distributed by the authorities, on which the symbols of all parties presenting lists in the particular constituency are printed.<sup>1</sup> All that the voter has to do is to withdraw into the voting booth, draw a line across the symbol of the party he wishes to

<sup>1</sup> The symbol of the Fascista list was the Roman fasces and axe, that of the *liste bis* the eagle and the fasces, that of the Popolari a cross on a shield, etc.

vote for, fold up the paper; and hand it to the president of the *seggio*, who drops it into the voting urn.

During the period preceding the election the various leading political men made a number of speeches, usually in theatres, restaurants, etc. The Fascista party alone issued picture posters, which were plastered about on the walls ; the subjects were all of a kind, destined to remind the voters of the vast change for the better which the general conditions of the country had undergone since the new Government had been in power. The speeches of the Fascista leaders also struck the same note, and instead of buttering up the electorate with flattery and making all kinds of unrealizable promises served in a sauce of rhetorical generalities, they pointed out the results already achieved, but frankly admitted that further sacrifices were still necessary before Italy was thoroughly reconstituted on a sound basis. Thus, Luigi Federzoni, in a speech at Perugia on March 18th, declared that in order to balance the budget the Government had had to eschew cheap popularity. "Fascismo in power might have spoken to its supporters as Garibaldi spoke on landing at Marsala : 'I offer you nothing but the hardships of sacrifice, the uncertainty of fate, the splendour of faith.' "

Another point on which most of the speakers, both Fascisti and opponents, frequently dwelt was the question of liberty. Acerbo at Aquila on the 18th, made a distinction between freedom of thought and moral propaganda of ideas, on which the Government nor the Fascisti would dream of encroaching, and licence to organize action against the State and the present social order, which will not be tolerated. In 1919, he reminded his hearers, Socialist, Republican, and Anarchist leaders made a regular declaration of war against the Government in order to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, and organized a plan of campaign carried out by means of riots and strikes in the public services and the chief industries, which brought the country to the verge of disaster. A notable pronouncement was that of Antonio Salandra at Milan on the 19th. Although he had refused to join Fascismo or accept office,

he had always given the Government his unswerving support. While expressing his firm belief in true Liberalism, he accepted Fascismo as a force calculated to save Italy from the effects of false Liberalism. He himself had declared, both during the war and immediately after the armistice, that the Liberals, who had ruled Italy for so many decades, must be prepared to transmit power to the young nation of combatants. He denied that Mussolini's advent to office was unconstitutional ; he had been properly appointed and had merely rejected certain recent interpretations and traditions which were not in the Constitution. The new zealots of constitutionalism are those who between 1919 and 1922 were distorting the Statuto, mutilating the prerogatives of the Crown, and trying to make the Chamber of Deputies omnipotent over all the other organs of the State. He asked those who now profess to deplore the oppression of freedom whether "they sincerely believed that the Italian people were enjoying less liberty to-day than they were in the days which seem but are not far away, when strikes were imposed on the workers, the public services were constantly held up, the labour unions enjoyed despotic power, estates and factories were seized and houses no longer secure." Liberty to work is the liberty which the people prize more than the unlimited right of holding public meetings and conducting revolutionary propaganda. After pointing out the great benefits which Fascismo had conferred on the country both at home and abroad, in spite of inevitable errors of men and actions, he concluded by exalting the great qualities of Mussolini, in supporting whom "we intend to serve not a man but the country."

Giolitti spoke to his old constituents at Dronero on March 16th, and made a somewhat curious apology for himself and his policy. Without actually attacking the Fascista Government, he tried to prove that most of its achievements were in reality attributable to his own action. He strongly criticized the policy of his predecessor Nitti and his successor Bonomi, and admitted that the Socialists and Popolari had made Parliamentary Government impossible, so that it was not to be wondered at that a Government

outside Parliament should have arisen, and it was for this reason that he supported it. He also approved of the new electoral law. The Duke of Cesaro' made two speeches in Sicily, in the first of which he admitted that there were some good points in the present Government, but that while Fascismo had once been necessary, it had now become dangerous because it encroached on the "immortal principles" of democracy ; but in the second he definitely pronounced himself against the Government, using arguments which would have had more weight if he himself had been a member of it for fifteen months.

Amendola spoke at Naples attacking the Government in the name of democracy, chiefly on account of the present electoral law, which he declared was unconstitutional and regarded as null and void ; this of course led to the retort that he, the Constitutional purist, was the real iconoclast of the Constitution because he denied the validity of a law which, whatever its defects, had been regularly discussed and approved by a large majority in both Chambers. Bonomi at Milan on the 28th recognized the merits of the judicial, administrative, and educational reforms carried out by the Fascista Government, but criticized its internal policy. While it was necessary, he said, to re-establish order after the intolerable license of the post-war period, there were but two legitimate ways of doing it—by persuading and conciliating the turbulent, or by means of the law. The present Government has adopted neither of these processes, but has maintained order by means of the armed force of a party ; even when it seemed inclined to repress illegalism, it fails because illegalism was too strong for it. He criticized the electoral law, and concluded by expressing his faith in the vitality of the democratic idea, "which does not die even if to-day it is mocked at and outlawed."

Mussolini himself delivered the most striking of all the electoral addresses in Rome on March 23rd, the fifth anniversary of the foundation of the Fasci, in the presence of the mayors of five thousand Fascista or pro-Fascista municipalities. He insisted on the revolutionary character of the

Fascista movement, but added that, unlike other revolutions, it had abstained from punishing its vanquished opponents. "But I am convinced, and we must shout it aloud so that all may hear, that if it were necessary, in order to defend our revolution, to do to-morrow what we did not do before, we should not hesitate to do it." To those who denied that Fascismo had any doctrine, he replied that no other movement had a sounder or more definite doctrine than Fascismo, which was based on the necessity that the State must be strong and defend itself and the nation against all attacks, on the collaboration of classes, respect for religion, and the proper appreciation of all national energies. To Giolitti he replied distinguishing between the Liberalism of Salandra in favour of intervention and the Liberalism of the *parecchio*. "It is true that the Tricolour is to-day on the Monte Nevoso. But if we had followed the suggestions of the Liberalism of Dronero the Tricolour might at most be waving over the station of Cervignano and perhaps we should never have reached Salorno.<sup>1</sup> Monte Nevoso we might have seen, if you will allow me to use a trench warfare expression, through a binocular. Symbolically we might have placed Giolitti's *palamidone*<sup>2</sup> on its summit, whereas the glorious Tricolour is now waving up there." To those who asked what the Government would do after the elections he replied that it would govern through Parliament, provided that Parliament showed itself capable of working, and that if any of the 1,700 laws made by the Fascista Government proved imperfect they would be improved. In conclusion he promised to reduce the pressure of taxation, for, although the budget must be balanced, the country must not be reduced to a state of exhaustion. As for political pressure, "if it is desired that Fascismo—the Government and the party—should reduce that pressure, our adversaries must accept the accomplished fact." But if the anti-national parties continue to intrigue against the

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 20–21. Had Italy accepted Austria's offers in 1915 instead of going to war, she would have acquired only a part of the Trentino and the territory west of the Isonzo.

<sup>2</sup> *Palamidone* means long overcoat; the peculiar cut of that worn by Giolitti appears in all the caricatures of him.

State and talk of having recourse to violence, as the Communists are doing, then, "instead of reducing the pressure it will be necessary to give another turn to the screw." The forward march must not be deflected. "We must go forward. We must make Italy great. That is the infallible aim of Fascismo."

If the Prime Minister's speech was the most eloquent, that of the Finance Minister announced the most striking achievement of the Fascista Government. We have seen how in May, 1923, Professor De Stefani had declared that the deficit for the financial year, 1923-24 had been reduced to 1,187,000,000, involving a corresponding increase of the internal debt, to which must be added the sum of 1,429,000,000 for the issue of reconstruction bonds at 3½ per cent for the devastated area to be paid out in twenty-five years. In his speech at Milan on March 30, 1924, he was able to announce that, owing to the satisfactory revenue returns, the deficit of 1,187,000,000 would have disappeared by end of the financial year, i.e. on July 1st, and that the increase in the debt due to the reconstruction bonds would be likewise eliminated in consequence of the general increase in the State's income. He expressed confidence in the possibility of maintaining the stability of the financial situation on account of the remarkable increase in the percentage of the permanent as compared with the temporary revenue. It was now possible to pay off one milliard of the debt by reducing the short term Treasury bonds and the State's fiduciary circulation. He also called attention to the considerable rise in the value of the consolidated State bonds, which, issued at 85, had at one time fallen to 79·65 and were now at 94·44.<sup>1</sup> and to the fact that the State, by suspending all increase of the debt, would no longer absorb any part of the nation's savings; in 1920-21 it had absorbed 11,864,000,000, 6,282,000,000 in 1921-22, 2,283,000,000 in 1922-23, whereas to-day the whole of the nation's savings would be available for non-Government investments. Finally, he confirmed the Premier's promise to reduce the pressure of taxation, but warned the nation

<sup>1</sup> In May, 1924, they reached par.

that no useless expenditure must be indulged on the strength of the *pareggio*, and that the State must protect itself against "the parasites of the Treasury." This financial statement made a deep impression and created a widespread satisfaction throughout the country. The balancing of the budget, which three or even two years ago had seemed a dream of the far distant future, was now an accomplished fact. The chief merit of Professor De Stefani and of him who summoned him to the Finance Ministry and kept him there, as Professor Einaudi in the critical *Corriere della Sera* pointed out, lies in his firm decision of not despairing. To this decision are due the reorganization of the State's industrial undertakings, the pitiless rigour in controlling public expenditure, and the elimination of useless officials. This success was popularly described as the second great Italian victory after Vittorio Veneto. The opponents of the Government are apt to claim that much of the merit for this drastic financial reorganization is due to De Stefani's predecessors ; but if this is true to a certain extent, it must be added that previous Finance Ministers had no other idea than that of imposing the most grinding taxation, which tended to dry up the very sources of revenue, and that none of them had dared attempt to introduce any drastic economies and do away with the reckless extravagance demanded by the demagogues.

The result of the elections was to a large extent a foregone conclusion ; the Fascista list, supported by the mass of public opinion and backed both by the Government and by an admirable and perfectly disciplined party organization, was bound to secure a larger number of votes than any of the Opposition parties, split up as they were into numerous groups without cohesion. Even with the provision that only the party securing 25 per cent of the votes recorded was entitled to two-thirds of the seats in the Chamber, a provision introduced to placate the Popolari, it was evident that the Fascisti would succeed. But the victory at the polls was more overwhelming than even the most sanguine supporters of the Government believed possible.

The elections were held on April 6th, and went off very

calmly, save for a few isolated incidents and acts of violence, especially in some southern districts, Fascisti being as often victims as their opponents. In fact, there was far less disorder than at almost any previous election. The total number of votes recorded was 7,628,859, equal to 73 per cent of the registered voters (at the 1921 elections 58 per cent had voted, and at those of 1919 only 52 per cent); in many districts the voters were 80 per cent and even 90 per cent. Of these votes no less than 4,693,690 were for the Government list and the *liste bis*, i.e. 65·25 per cent, not including those in favour of certain minority lists whose candidates had explicitly declared themselves supporters of the Government. This practically corresponds to a two-thirds majority, thus belying the forecast that the Government would secure two-thirds of the seats in the Chamber only thanks to the machinery of the new electoral law. On the other hand, the fact that considerable numbers voted against the Government disproved the gloomy forebodings of Opposition Cassandras that only Fascisti or pro-Fascisti would be allowed to go to the polls. The system of a single ballot paper and that of voting within a closed booth secured absolute secrecy, and did away with the pressure of the party representatives on the voters at the polling stations.

Of the Opposition groups the Popolari proved the strongest, especially in Lombardy and Venetia; they secured 619,738 votes. Next came the Unitari Socialists, with 408,804, followed by the Maximalist Socialists with 358,349, and the Communists with 270,609. These three revolutionary parties, if taken together, obtained a total of 1,039,762 votes, which is more than any of the other Opposition groups, but the differences of opinion between them prevented them from forming a single block. They proved strongest in Lombardy, especially in the city of Milan, and Piedmont, although even there they were much less successful than in 1919 or 1921. The Republicans obtained 131,598 votes. The Social Democrats did not achieve a notable success, only securing 98,221 votes, mostly in Sicily, where some of their leaders enjoyed a

certain measure of popularity. The Constitutional Opposition came off badly (95,969 votes), while the dissident Fascisti fared even worse (18,195). Signor Giolitti's lists in Piedmont and Liguria obtained 68,920 votes.

The new Chamber is largely composed of new men; many members of the late Chamber, including the ex-Premiers Nitti and Facta, as well as many other Ministers, did not stand, while another ex-Premier, Ivanoe Bonomi, who did stand, was not elected. Amendola, the leader of the Constitutional Opposition in the South, was returned. Of the dissident Fascisti only Cesare Forni was successful. All the 355 candidates of the Government list (De Nava, as we have seen, had died), and 19 of the four *liste bis*, were returned; of these 260 are Fascisti and 114 Liberals, Democrats, National Catholics, etc. In addition, there are 45 deputies belonging to other Constitutional groups—17 Liberal Democrats, 11 Social Democrats, 12 of the Constitutional Opposition, 3 of the new Peasants' Party, and 2 for the Sardinian Party; 14 of these belong to the Opposition, but all are Constitutional. The Socialists and Communists, who in the last Chamber were 135, are now 64 (27 Unitari, 22 Maximalists, and 17 Communists). The Popolari have dropped from 106 to 40, whereas the Republicans have gained one seat (they are now 7). The *allogenì* (Germans and Slavs, curiously bracketed together), who were 8 before, are now 4. The Government can therefore count on a majority of 406 in a Chamber of 535.

This striking victory will enable Signor Mussolini to continue his policy of reconstruction on an absolutely Constitutional basis, and no one can now claim that he does not enjoy the support of the nation; before the election he had strong support in the country, but no real majority on which he could count in the Chamber, whereas now his supporters outside the Chamber are represented by a corresponding majority within it.

The problems still before the Government are many and formidable. The dangers and obstacles to be overcome are not all of an internal character; the uncertain international

situation is a hindrance even to internal reconstruction, or, at least, it prevents the good results already attained from being felt to their full extent. But there are also purely internal difficulties in the way ; selfishness, greed, lack of public spirit, factiousness, personal ambition, ignorance, muddleheadedness cannot be eliminated within a few months or even years. But the improvement is immense, and real progress is being achieved at a rate never before dreamed of. One has the feeling that the country is really advancing and shaking off the shackles of bad old traditions. With his new Parliament Signor Mussolini's position should be even stronger than before ; but it is not only his own position which is stronger—it is the new system and the new method of dealing with public affairs, the new spirit of patriotism, which have penetrated deep into the heart of the nation. While every Italian must earnestly hope that Benito Mussolini may be spared for many a long year, yet even if he were to disappear from public life others will be found to carry on the good work, for he is creating, indeed to some extent has already created, a new school of political men, a new generation of citizens. The evil past can not and must not return.



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